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Neo-Victorian Cannibalism
A Reading of Contemporary Neo-Victorian Fiction

Ho, Lai Ming

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**Neo-Victorian Cannibalism:
A Reading of Contemporary Neo-Victorian Fiction**

by

Tammy HO Lai Ming

**Thesis for the Degree of PhD
King's College, University of London
2012**

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed
Tammy HO Lai Ming

ABSTRACT

This thesis is about a body of contemporary neo-Victorian novels whose uneasy relationship with the past can be theorised in terms of aggressive eating, even cannibalism. Cannibalism operates on different levels throughout many works, and there is a sense of surreptitious insistence about it in the genre as a whole. Not only is the imagery of eating repeatedly used by critics to comprehend neo-Victorian literature, the theme of cannibalism itself also appears overtly or implicitly in a number of the novels and their Victorian prototypes, thereby mirroring the cannibalistic relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian. I argue that aggressive eating or cannibalism can be seen as a pathological and defining characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction. It provides a framework for understanding the genre's origin, its conflicted, ambivalent and violent relationship with its Victorian predecessors and the grotesque and gothic effects that it generates in the fiction.

Each chapter hinges on one type of 'cannibal' through which the discussion of the theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism is elucidated. The first chapter investigates the phenomenon of incorporating the biographies of Victorian celebrities in neo-Victorian fiction. Using Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008), I discuss how Charles Dickens and Sir John Franklin are portrayed as sexual and colonial Bluebeard cannibals, a form of representation which provides a revisionist critique of the misogynist, oppressive and racist undercurrent of Victorian ideology. The second chapter examines the vampiric cannibal and analyses three neo-Victorian adaptations of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) – Tom Holland's *Supping With Panthers* (1996), Leslie S. Klinger's *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008) and Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt's *Dracula the Un-Dead* (2009). In these works, the writers simultaneously cannibalise the original text and its author's biography, and in so doing challenge Stoker's authorial power and clear a creative space for themselves. In the third chapter, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is read as an important intertext. The chapter studies the representation of Bertha, a character often portrayed in cannibalistic terms, in *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and three relatively recent neo-Victorian novels – Lin Haire-Sargeant's *H: The Story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights* (1992), D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000) and Emma Tennant's *Adèle: Jane Eyre's Hidden Story* (2002). I argue that a narrative reorientation away from Bertha in the three later novels, which cannibalise both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, prompts us to reconsider the level of political engagement

of the neo-Victorian genre. The fourth chapter centres on the ‘academic cannibal’ and discusses the role of scholarly characters in neo-Victorian novels including A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990), Graham Swift’s *Ever After* (1992), A.N. Wilson’s *A Jealous Ghost* (2005), Lloyd Jones’s *Mister Pip* (2006), Scarlett Thomas’s *The End of Mr Y* (2006) and Justine Picardie’s *Daphne* (2008). I argue that the use of scholars in these novels reflects a mutual dependence between the neo-Victorian genre and the academy, a relationship that can be viewed as both cannibalistic and competitive. Finally, the Conclusion speculates on how, under certain circumstances, the Victorian can be seen to cannibalise the contemporary and how the relationship between past and present will continue to evolve in the neo-Victorian genre.

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In *Cannibalism: from Sacrifice to Survival* (1994), Hans Askenasy writes:

[A] most enjoyable moment has arrived: that of expressing appreciation to that person without whom this endeavour would never have taken place, and who may now enjoy the fruits of his labour of love, luxuriating like a tired man in a warm scented bath: myself. (8)

I, however, certainly cannot claim to be the only person whose endeavour has made this project possible. I am hugely indebted to my supervisor Professor Josephine McDonagh for her confidence in my work, erudition, enthusiasm and for making the writing of this thesis both a rewarding and pleasant experience. I would also like to thank Professor Douglas Kerr. I will be forever grateful for his knowledge, wit and unfailing encouragement of both my academic and poetic pursuits.

Along the way, many other mentors, friends and fellow students have provided support and comfort – intellectually, emotionally and socially. They know who they are but I would particularly like to single out Katharina Boehm, Cyril Camus, Oliver Farry, David Gillott, Jarno Jakonen, Reid Mitchell, Harshana Rambukwella, Matt Shoard, Eddie Tay and Marie Yip Wai Shan. Their lively discussions and creative insights have lit up many a dark moment.

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If you wish to preserve the spirit of a dead author, you must not skin him, stuff him, and set him up in a case. You must eat him, digest him, and let him live in you, with such life as you have, for better or worse.

–Samuel Butler

The history of the world my sweet –
– is who gets eaten and who gets to eat.

–Stephen Sondheim

INTRODUCTION

Neo-Victorian Cannibalism

‘Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few are to be chewed and digested.’ –Francis Bacon (1597)

‘The retro-Victorian novel is not a new genre, it is the novel of all genres, the composite novel of its epoch, which highlights the cannibalising, ever-broader, all-encompassing and all-assimilating nature of the novel’ –Christian Gutleben (2001)

This thesis is about a body of contemporary neo-Victorian novels whose ambivalent relationship with the past can be theorised in terms of aggressive eating, even cannibalism. Although cannibalism does not appear as a theme in all neo-Victorian novels, it is pervasive in neo-Victorian writing, whether fictional or critical, in its extended sense of aggressive appropriation of pre-existing texts. Not only is the imagery of eating repeatedly used by critics to comprehend neo-Victorian literature, the theme of cannibalism itself also appears overtly or implicitly in a number of the novels and their Victorian prototypes. I argue that aggressive eating or cannibalism, then, can be seen as a pathological and defining characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction. It provides a framework for understanding the genre’s origin, its conflicted and violent relationship with its Victorian predecessors and the grotesque and gothic effects it generates in the fiction. Some novelists and critics have touched upon the relationship between cannibalism and neo-Victorian literature, indicating that the connection has not gone entirely unnoticed. However, there is as yet no substantial study on the topic. This thesis aims to discuss how the idea of aggressive eating or cannibalism can be used to analyse and theorise the relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian. In the following, I will first use Tom Phillips’s *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel* (1966-) to demonstrate the contemporary’s simultaneously aggressive and ambivalent consumption of the Victorian. I will then present the theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism, informed by Freud’s idea of the ‘totem meal’, which provides an analytical explanation of the genre’s cannibalistic origin, nature and motivations.

I. Book-eating book: Tom Phillips’s *A Humument*

In *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (2001), Christian Gutleben notes that it was ‘in the 1980s and 1990s that many British novelists [...] unearthed and resuscitated the great Victorian tradition’ (5-6). Gutleben’s quote speaks to the rapid rise of the neo-Victorian genre which occurred in the last two decades of the twentieth century. With the publication of Peter Carey’s and A.S. Byatt’s bestselling and Booker Prize-winning *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) and *Possession* (1990) respectively, the genre entered the literary mainstream and has remained there ever since. The neo-Victorian phenomenon has also been evident in other forms of entertainment and in scholarly research. Production companies regularly offer television and film adaptations and modernisations of Victorian classics; the Booker Prize shortlist has featured novels with at

least some nineteenth-century elements almost every year for the past fifteen;¹ the study of neo-Victorian fiction has become an established academic discipline, manifested in the founding of the *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* in 2008 as well as in the publication of an increasing number of articles and book-length studies (Stetz, 2012:345).²

Despite its growth in the late twentieth century, many scholars trace the birth of the neo-Victorian genre back to 1966. Academics choose this date as the starting point for the genre as it was in this year in which Jean Rhys published *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a part revision and part prequel to Charlotte Brontë's canonical *Jane Eyre* (1847).³ In Rhys's work, some of the tropes and generic elements that make up the neo-Victorian were established (such as re-appropriating a Victorian story for revisionist perspectives and imagining an embodied

¹ Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), Mick Jackson's *The Underground Man* (1997), Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie* (1998), Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999), Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001), Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004), Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George* (2005), Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* (2006), Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2007), Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* (2007), Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), A.S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* (2009), Adam Fould's *The Quickening Maze* (2009), Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010) and Carol Birch's *Jamrach's Menagerie* (2011).

² Margaret D. Stetz (2012) writes, 'Many of these volumes, it seems, are being issued by the firm of Palgrave Macmillan, though Rodopi has just inaugurated its own 'Neo-Victorian Series', under the editorship of Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben. Perhaps the coming years will see the major university presses – Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, and others – welcoming this new area of study just as warmly' (345).

³ 1966 can be considered a defining moment for the contemporary's return to the nineteenth century. This year finally saw the publication of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* after personal issues had hindered her earlier completion of the work – according to Coral Ann Howells (1991), there is some evidence that 'Rhys had written a version of her *Jane Eyre* novel by 1939' (105). In retrospect, the delay may have been fortuitous; had the novel been published earlier, the audience may not have been as receptive to its postcolonial and feminist reworkings of *Jane Eyre*. Although *Wide Sargasso Sea* is usually seen as the first neo-Victorian novel, its publication was part of a larger intellectual and artistic revisitation of the Victorian era that occurred in the 1960s. For example, Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians: a Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* was also published in 1966. Marcus's book and the wider availability of nineteenth-century pornography at the time encouraged a readjustment of attitudes towards Victorian sexuality and gender relations, a readjustment which provided neo-Victorian writers with fruitful topics for exploration. John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), another novel in the neo-Victorian canon published in the 1960s, was written in this same intellectual environment. Also published in 1966, James Laver's *Victoriana* celebrates a rekindled taste for Victorian art and collectables. In a similar vein, the 'Victorian Collector' series (1961–68), edited by Hugh Wakefield, was 'one sign of this new-found enthusiasm for nineteenth-century knick-knacks' (Taylor, 2004:7). This interest in Victorian objects might have been a response to the passing away of the last generations of Victorians in the 1950s and 1960s. Their disappearance, according to Kate Mitchell in *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterlives* (2010a), contributed to the 'rehabilitation of Victoriana' around this time (54). Mitchell's comment primarily regards material goods such as accessories, clothing and furniture, but this same atmosphere may explain an interest in reworking and rewriting elements of Victorian literature. Another cultural trend that may have led to the rise of neo-Victorianism was the shift of focus in historical studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s away from 'grand historical narratives of wars, prime ministers, governments and economic change' to 'fragmentary records of "ordinary" individuals and their "experience" of historical change' (Maidment, 2001:153). This new view of the past may have contributed to the representation of marginalised personae in neo-Victorian fiction.

existence for historically marginalised characters) and as a result, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has become for many the foundational text of the neo-Victorian genre.⁴

1966 proves a fitting start date for the neo-Victorian genre for another reason: it was the year Tom Phillips began his long-running literary and artistic project *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*.⁵ In this work, which Phillips is still continuing,⁶ he treats every page of W.H. Mallock's 'forgotten' (as said in Phillips's sleeve notes) 1892 novel *A Human Document* by hand, through cutting, painting, pasting, circling, pencilling, collaging, typing and covering over, so that only a handful of words from the source text remain on each page. For example, Phillips crosses 'an Doc' out of the original *A Human Document* to form the new title *A Humument* (Fig. 1). His texts

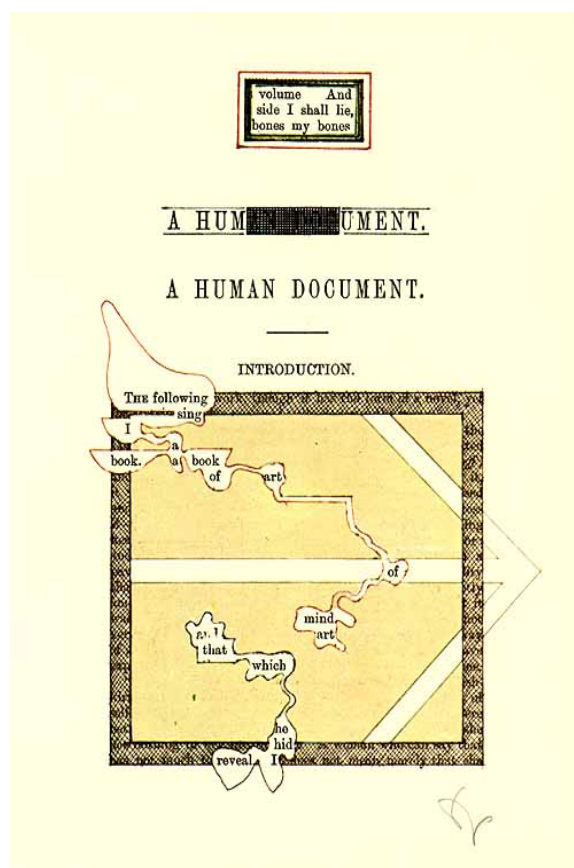


Fig. 1

may seem random, and indeed occasionally the words have been selected by chance, such as through tossing coins ('Notes on *A Humument*', hereafter 'Notes'), but for the most part, they are deliberately chosen and the result is that *A Humument* tells the adventure of a modern-day protagonist called Bill Toge. That the new story entirely derives from material and words used in the Victorian novel and is changing with each new edition not only calls to mind Frankenstein's patchworked creature but also suggests the malleability of texts and postmodernist deconstruction – Phillips is literally deconstructing the Victorian source novel.

I consider *A Humument* an 'unlikely' neo-Victorian novel. It is in many ways not a novel at all, but a piece of visual art. It is also constantly being revised by Phillips which puts it at

⁴ *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s originary status in the neo-Victorian genre is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

⁵ 'I started work on the book late in 1966' (Phillips, 'Notes on *A Humument*'). In this thesis I use the fourth edition of *A Humument* (2005), unless otherwise noted.

⁶ The fifth print edition was released in 2012. According to the book description, 'This new fifth edition follows its predecessors by incorporating Phillip's latest revisions and reworkings, and celebrates an artistic enterprise that is forty-five years old and still actively a work in progress'.

odds with the typical notion of a novel, a form that is largely set when published. That having been said, one may argue that this continual renewal and regeneration is reminiscent of the Victorian process of serialisation. Even at its most novelistic, *A Humument* does not demonstrate the *purposeful* return to the Victorian which characterises other texts in the genre. Neo-Victorian novels, according to Dana Shiller (1997),

adopt a postmodern approach to history and [...] are set at least partially in the nineteenth century. This capacious umbrella includes texts that revise specific Victorian precursors, texts that imagine new adventures for familiar Victorian characters, and 'new' Victorian fictions that imitate nineteenth-century literary conventions. (558)

Shiller's definition highlights the neo-Victorian novels' deliberate return to the Victorian.⁷ This consciousness is explicit in the writers' choice of revisiting existing and often well-known Victorian novels, historical personae and fictional characters as well as their attempt to replicate Victorian literary styles. None of this is found in *A Humument*. True, the book has received some attention in the neo-Victorian field,⁸ but I think the neo-Victorianness of the work needs closer scrutiny, especially in relation to the sense of purpose I mentioned. Phillips's narrative is set in the modern-day and does not (re)tell a Victorian story. Unlike other neo-Victorian writers, Phillips is not intentionally trying to evoke a sense of the past. He writes in the 'Notes' that he bought Mallock's book for his project simply because it fitted the rules he had set: 'the first (coherent) book I could find for threepence'. It is purely by chance, then, that Phillips chose Mallock's novel as the source text for his artistic experiment. It may thus be somewhat reductive to regard *A Humument* as a neo-Victorian work just because its source material is Victorian. Phillips did not purposefully seek inspiration from a Victorian novel (his technique could reasonably be applied to any book from any period) nor does he have anything substantial to say about nineteenth-century history or literature.⁹

⁷ Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's definition of the genre in *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010) also stresses self-consciousness: 'To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*' (4, emphasis original). Heilmann and Llewellyn believe that not 'all fictions post-1901 that happen to have a Victorian setting or re-write a Victorian text or a Victorian character' are neo-Victorian. Instead, only 'texts about the metahistoric and metacultural ramifications of such historical engagement' deserve the label (6). This definition is likely informed by the notion of 'historiographic metafiction', a term coined by Linda Hutcheon (1988) to refer to fiction that consciously questions 'the grounding of historical knowledge in the past' (92).

⁸ See, for example, the Links section on the website of the *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* and the syllabus of the 'Neo-Victorianism' course at the University of Glasgow.

⁹ Although he did not purposefully start out to revisit a Victorian text, Phillips does use the original story in his novel. He writes: '[*A Humument*] includes poems, music scores, parodies, notes on aesthetics, autobiography, concrete texts, romance, mild erotica, as well as the undertext of Mallock's original story'. Phillips also reuses two characters from the Victorian book.

Yet, even though Phillips's return to the Victorian was initiated by chance, I consider *A Humument* to be a representative neo-Victorian novel. The project has paralleled the life of the genre, as it began the same year in which the first neo-Victorian novel was published and has been continuing since. The fact that Phillips's book is crafted from the Victorian source (in its most literal and material sense) is a physical manifestation of contemporary nostalgia for the materiality, form and texture of Victorian books in an increasingly digitalised age. This nostalgia pervades much of neo-Victorian fiction, especially in terms of cover designs, maps, epigraphs and other paratextual elements borrowed from the nineteenth century. Also, just like most neo-Victorian novels, *A Humument* responds to and teases out the underlying themes and elements of its Victorian source. Phillips says in an unpublished interview that some elements in Mallock's text are 'waiting to be discovered, but not in an active sense. In a passive or innocent sense. Innocent of what is done to them. What is done to them might enrich them' ('Interview').¹⁰ Phillips's description can equally be applied to many neo-Victorian novels' treatment of their nineteenth-century sources. Additionally, as Daniel Traister points out, the artistic methods that Phillips adopts aptly correspond to the manuscripts which make up Mallock's work. The story of the Victorian novel has ostensibly been pieced together by the narrator out of different written materials characterised by 'baffled and crippled sentences' (9), 'abrupt transitions' and 'odd lapses of grammar' (10). According to Traister, *A Humument* is thus 'a literal re-construction of *A Human Document* which Mallock (or his narrator) has allegedly constructed in much the same way, using materials just as refractory – and just as malleable' ('W.H. Mallock and A HUMAN DOCUMENT').

More importantly, *A Humument*'s relationship with its Victorian source can be configured as that between eater and eaten, a relationship that speaks to some of the fundamental characteristics of the neo-Victorian genre. Phillips himself considers Mallock's novel as food, asserting that for his purposes, the Victorian text is 'a feast' ('Notes') and that he has 'eaten 11 or 12 copies of *The Human Document*' ('Interview'). With this in mind, the word 'Treated' in the book's subtitle takes on gastronomic connotations: the Victorian novel is like

¹⁰ The interview with Tom Phillips was conducted by Gillian Partington and Adam Smyth (both of Birkbeck, University of London) on 16 September 2011, at a café in the South London Gallery. Quotes from the interview are used here with permission. The interview is now published in *London Review of Books* (4 October, 2012): <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2012/10/04/tom-phillips/tom-phillips-an-interview>

premium cured meat or a delightful treat to be savoured.¹¹ But what has *A Human Document* to do with food? Jason Scott-Warren believes that ‘we habitually use images associated with eating to describe the processes of reading and writing’ (‘The Edible Nature of Words’). What does regarding *A Human Document* as edible usefully say about the relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian?

Understanding *A Human Document* as food suggests that the contemporary work relies on the Victorian text as material nourishment which it uses to sustain its own individual body. For Phillips, Mallock’s *A Human Document* has been an indispensable source of artistic nourishment for his own project for over four decades. In fact, *A Human Document* is almost the *only* source of material for Phillips, as one of his rules in the creation of *A Humument* is that ‘no extraneous material should be imported in the work’.¹² The contemporary text is thus produced through the intertextual consumption of the body of the Victorian work in its entirety. If *A Human Document* provides a nourishing and extravagant meal for *A Humument*, it is also a banquet that has not yet come to an end. In Mallock’s novel, Phillips has been able to find a constant source for new inspiration. As he said in 1980, he has ‘extracted from it over one thousand texts, and [has] yet to find a situation, statement or thought which its words cannot be adapted to cover’ (‘Notes’). And the number of variations has only increased since. Some have taken in contemporary events.¹³ For example, in the Humument App (released in 2010), which shows the project embracing the latest technology, one page reads: ‘pasted on to the present / see, it is nine eleven / the time singular / which broke down illusion’ (4). In newer editions, Phillips has also used himself – his biography – in the project, saying that ‘I’ll never write an autobiography, so I have an autobiography that appears in this form’ (‘Interview’).¹⁴ This suggests that he has incorporated his own life into the work, demonstrating a communion between the Victorian, neo-Victorian and himself.

¹¹ Coincidentally, the narrator in the New York edition of Mallock’s text also uses the word ‘treated’ in the description of his handling of the manuscripts (iii), although the sentence (‘a short account of how I obtained my materials, what those materials were, and the manner in which they have been treated’) is not present in the version of *A Human Document* that Phillips uses. It is therefore uncertain whether Phillips’s selection of the word is inspired by Mallock. Phillips explains his understanding of ‘treated’: ‘Treated is changed. I’ve changed it in this way. And I give it a treat as well’ (‘Interview’).

¹² Phillips further explains: ‘I’m not supposed to cart in loads of stuff from other sources. [...] Sometimes I use postcards. They belong to me. Anything that belongs to me or that I have done I can reuse’ (‘Interview’). This admission, that he only includes his belongings and creations in *A Human Document*, speaks to a kind of communion between himself and Mallock’s text.

¹³ Phillips has also used Mallock’s text for other artistic expressions, including an opera (‘Notes’).

¹⁴ Jean Rhys, too, incorporates her own biography into *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as discussed in Chapter Three.

If the relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian can be understood as that between eater and eaten, the relationship is also characterised by a sense of aggressive ambivalence. The eater desires food but because of his reliance on it for nourishment he has become vulnerable. Additionally, he must destroy the food in order to absorb its substances for sustenance. In an ideal situation, the distinction between the eater and food eventually collapses and there is total identity between the two, as the food becomes part of the eater's body. In Phillips's treatment of Mallock's novel, we see this interplay between aggression, ambivalence and communion. *A Humument* must rely on the material body of the source text for its artistic expression. In each edition of *A Humument*, Mallock's novel is consumed by Phillips's contemporary text. The result is that the Victorian work is digested and used to create a new textual body. In this new formation, only a distorted and stripped-down version of the Victorian original (in the form of slivers of texts) remains clearly evident. Importantly, even though the Victorian text is incorporated, it is not completely destroyed; otherwise Phillips's project can no longer be continued. The appropriation of the Victorian by the contemporary, in the case of *A Humument*, transubstantiates the body of the Victorian book into the body of the contemporary work.

That the contemporary and the Victorian texts literally and physically share the same space – in fact, co-exist in *one body* – speaks to the sense of one text cannibalising another.¹⁵ In fact, the 'body' is a recurrent visual motif and metaphor which appears in much of Phillips's work – a constant reminder of 'text' as 'body'. The process of textual cannibalism is perhaps self-reflexively depicted in some of the pages from *A Humument* itself. In the image on the next page, for example, we can see that Phillips has painted the entire page from Mallock's work in red, black and white to form a grotesque female figure, sitting in profile, apparently turned inside out. This female, mouth slightly ajar, appears to be eating the black text, which hovers around her. The bulk of her red form is reminiscent of the inside of a human with connected white parts, suggesting intestines, within which words in black are in the process of being digested and absorbed. In this image, Phillips has formed a textual body out of Mallock's text, which is in turn feeding off of the body of the very text that she is made from. In this interaction between text and image, we witness an explicit, unambiguous illustration

¹⁵ In the interview (fn. 10), Partington asks Phillips, 'I was at a conference about book eating, in Cambridge. One of the speakers was talking about cannibalism and your work: she thought that *The Humument* was a kind of cannibalism'. Phillips responds, 'Yes, it [is] cannibalising something. That's true'. (In this exchange, Partington is referring to a paper I presented entitled 'Book-eating Books: Tom Phillips's *A Humument* and Neo-Victorian Fiction' at the 'Eating Words: Text, Image, Food' conference on 13 September 2011.)

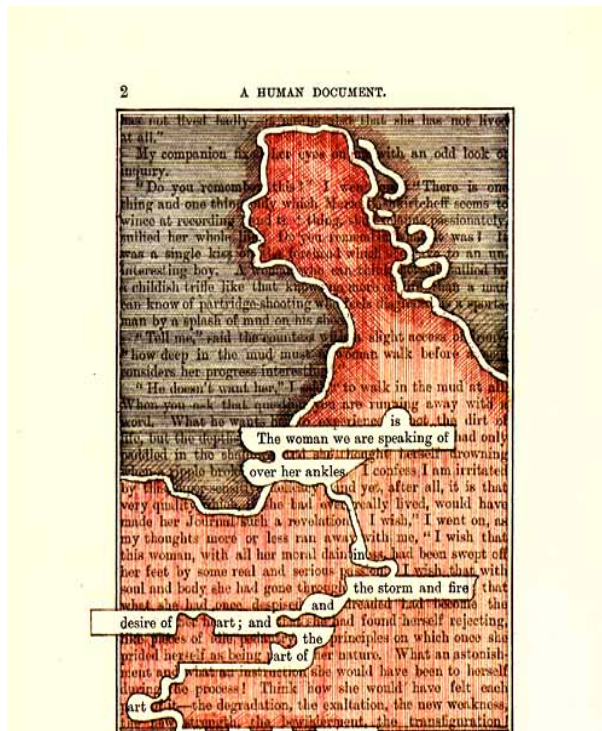


Fig. 2



of the process of textual cannibalism and communion at work. It might also be considered a visual representation of Phillips's treatment of Mallock's work as a whole: one book eating and living off another for its own existence and expression. The result is a kind of deformed textual body, in which different layers of the work are evident and reveal the transformation that has been undertaken. The book has in a sense metamorphosed from the natural 'Human' document to the deformed 'Humument'.

On this page, Mallock's original Victorian text is still visible and readable underneath Phillips's contemporary layer of paint,

suggesting the spectral and lingering indelibility of the nineteenth-century source. More importantly, a new image – that of a female textual body – emerges from the commingling of past and present material. This image, which has no counterpart in Mallock's work, is emblematic of the neo-Victorian's creative consumption of the Victorian. By creating something new, the contemporary redeems itself from simple parasitic feeding on the original and secures *A Humument's* own unique identity. There are, then, two strands evident in Phillips's use of the Victorian text: communion and identity-formation. On one hand, *A Humument's* cannibalism of *A Human Document* leads to communion between the two in the physical sense, as the works share one textual body. In fact, even Phillips's choice of name for his protagonist, Toge, which can only be derived from the words 'together' and 'altogether' in the original, speaks to the *togetherness* of the source material and the new work. On the other hand, Toge is also an entirely new character created from old material, a primary example of how the contemporary novel fashions a new separate identity through cannibalism. *A Humument* transforms the Victorian text into a distinctive contemporary product which, according to Marvin Sackner, 'encompass[es] all of contemporary and modern art history' ('Humumentism: The Works and Ideas of Tom Phillips'). Such contemporary elements set the work firmly apart from its Victorian source. Indeed, in his use

of *A Human Document*, Phillips may have created a new genre in *A Humument*, which has the reputation of being the first ‘treated’ book that covers up a complete novel.¹⁶

The neo-Victorian as a whole can be seen as an extension of *A Humument* and the idea of the book-eating book: it is a cannibalistic genre which consumes the literary past for its own existence. The notion of cannibalism I have used to analyse Phillips’s work can be applied to the understanding of the neo-Victorian genre as a whole: in the same way that *A Humument* has been living off *A Human Document*, neo-Victorian fiction generally can be seen as having been consuming and revising the same finite stock of nineteenth-century texts (or authors-as-texts) since (and even before) the release of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*. This cannibalistic relationship is *fundamental* to the genre – it is not an option for neo-Victorian writers *not* to be cannibalistic.

Neo-Victorian works are carnivorous in their incorporation of past elements and their authors have primarily looked to Victorian texts for sources of inspiration and expression. Their works are in one way or other ‘extracted’ from the older novels. On the most basic level, neo-Victorian cannibalism takes the form of swallowing parts of nineteenth-century works more or less intact. One obvious example is the use of Victorian texts on the inside front and back covers and flyleaves, chapter epigraphs or, more integrally to the body of the novel, as quotations in the main text. The Victorian words, either as epigraphs or in-text citations, have been exhumed from their ‘natural’ nineteenth-century body and incorporated into a ‘foreign’ neo-Victorian one. More crucially, these contemporary novels incorporate the substance (as opposed to style, discussed below) of nineteenth-century works, reusing and appropriating their authors, themes, plots, characters and spatio-temporal settings. And just like Phillips who adapts and consumes *A Human Document* to describe ‘a situation, statement or thought’, neo-Victorian writers rework earlier texts to articulate contemporary and sometimes personal concerns and anxieties. Neo-Victorian fiction also treats the Victorian in an ambivalent and aggressive manner similar to Phillips’s treatment of *A Human Document*. These novels rely

¹⁶ However, *A Humument* does have predecessors, even though Phillips was unaware of them when he began his project. For example, the Biblical Harmonies produced at Little Gidding in the 1630s and 1640s, which are ‘lavish folio books constructed by cutting up printed texts of the four Gospels, and gluing the fragmented texts back into a new order’ (Smyth, 2011), share striking similarities with Phillips’s work. That said, Phillips’s book is the most well-known *contemporary* example of such ‘treatment’ of past texts and has even become the model for others, notably Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes* (2010), which Foer created by cutting out portions of words from Bruno Schulz’s *The Street of Crocodiles* (1934). That Foer was inspired by *A Humument* seems clear as he visited Phillips to discuss *The Humument*. On the subsequent publication of *Tree of Codes*, Phillips expressed disappointment: ‘It’s a bit painful because... He didn’t half borrow from me!’ (‘Interview’).

on the substance of their literary ancestors for nourishment and demonstrate a desire to emulate the accomplishments of their forebears. But this reliance and reverence is mediated by a desire for *original* expression and to form an identity separate from the *original* Victorian authors and texts (note the double meanings of ‘original’). Thus, the neo-Victorian celebrates nineteenth-century fiction by openly copying its literary styles, plots and techniques, while simultaneously seeking to express new and revisionist ideas by condemning Victorian traditions and ideologies through feminist, postcolonial and social criticism and by presenting the stories of historically marginalised subjects: lesbians, madwomen, spiritualists and those from the lower classes (such as prostitutes and convicts). It also undermines the successes of Victorian writers through grotesque characterisations of the authors themselves and by distorting their characters and texts.¹⁷

II. Aggressive ambivalence: Towards a theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism

i. Mythic ancestor

Many critics have seen literary history in terms of a multi-generational family of writers. In his *Anxiety of Influence* (1997[1973]), for example, Harold Bloom alludes to Freud’s notion of ‘family romance’ (8) to describe later poets’ struggles with the influence of their powerful and famous precursors. According to Freud (1909), ‘The liberation of an individual, as he grows up, from the authority of his parents is one of the most necessary though one of the most painful results brought about by the course of his development’ (74). Yet, few critics have theorised the relationship between the different literary generations as cannibalistic. In this section, I will first discuss how the Victorian and the neo-Victorian can be seen as distended generations sharing the same ancestral background. In a later section, I will consider how members of later generations aggressively consume their ancestors in an attempt to fashion an independent identity.

Christian Gutleben in *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (2001) sees familial relationship as one of the pivotal aspects of neo-Victorian fiction. He contends that ‘for the writers of retro-Victorian fiction, the Victorian novelist seems to play the role of a genealogical – almost genetic – ancestor.

¹⁷ See, for example, Christian Gutleben’s ‘The disfigurement of the great Victorian figures’ (90-97) in *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001).

Possibly also of a mythic ancestor' (185). In *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010), Louisa Hadley agrees that the Victorians are 'Close enough for us to be aware that we are descended from them' and 'occupy a similar place to our grandparents' (7), while Andrzej Diniejko (2007) notes that 'The Victorian novel has produced many offsprings in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.' As Hadley suggests with the term 'grandparents', the Victorians are not the immediate parents of neo-Victorian authors (these would be instead the modernists or early postmodernists). It seems therefore that this particular ancestor has been chosen for their qualities and characteristics. Jorge Luis Borges (1962) said that 'Every writer *creates* his own precursors' (201, emphasis original), which is particularly true of the relationship between the neo-Victorian and Victorian.¹⁸

Of the triple ancestral roles Gutleben mentions (genealogical, genetic, mythic), he seems particularly interested in that of the 'mythic ancestor', on which he elaborates: 'Inevitably a mythic ancestor is partly envied, partly rebuffed, partly appropriated, partly discarded; inevitably retro-Victorian fiction's relation to its mythic ancestor is one of identification and rejection, of allegiance and distancing' (185-86). Although the Victorian can be seen as both a genealogical and genetic ancestor for the neo-Victorian, Gutleben's idea of the mythic ancestor is the most relevant to my discussion. To see the Victorian author as a mythic ancestor is to concede that he is not a direct predecessor of the contemporary writer *per se* but instead is imbued with mythological qualities and is the subject of worship and reverence. This may be one reason why neo-Victorian writers have decided to use the Victorian as their primary source material. The Victorian is considered by many to be the Golden Age of the English novel, in some sense its most 'mythic' period, and thus provides the most powerful epoch with which to seek identification and to reject or criticise.¹⁹ For British writers, the

¹⁸ The modernist writers and artists have also been characterised as the descendants of the Victorians, their relationship has even been described as 'Oedipal' (see Moore, 2008:137). However, the modernists' approach to asserting their own identity through, for example, inventing new styles and modes for artistic expression, is different from that adopted by neo-Victorian writers. As Isobel Armstrong writes in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993), 'The anxieties of modernism, trying to do without history, repress whatever relations the Victorians may seem to bear to twentieth-century writing' (1).

However, although neo-Victorian authors have unambiguously identified themselves with their Victorian literary influences, they are inevitably also influenced by works produced in other historical periods and literary modes including Modernism and Postmodernism. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the foundational neo-Victorian work, for instance, is primarily written within the modernist tradition.

¹⁹ While Firdous Azim (1993) calls the nineteenth century 'the great age of the novel' (90), others have been more assertive about the importance of the fiction produced in the period. Christian Gutleben (2001), for example, believes that 'the immense success of the Golden Age of the British novel' (7) attracts contemporary writers to the Victorian tradition and in turn, 'Retro-Victorian fiction [...] revives the voices and the patterns of the Golden Age of the English novel' (84-85). In her *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010), Louisa Hadley agrees that the 'nostalgic impulse which positions the Victorian era as a 'golden age' from which

nineteenth century is also ‘a period of British history [...] perceived as particularly significant in the construction of the nation’s sense of self and cultural identity’ (Rousselot, 2011:176). Seeing the Victorian as a kind of mythic ancestor helps further explain why neo-Victorian fiction has spread beyond the confines of Britain to overseas writers. If we view the Victorian novel and its artistic accomplishments as a kind of universal model with which all writers who choose English as a medium are familiar, then it is easier to understand how writers from divergent geographical backgrounds, political affiliations, ideological viewpoints, races and nationalities can regard the Victorian author as a common ‘ancestor’.²⁰

Neo-Victorian authors, however, have a complicated relationship with the Victorian. Gutleben – referring to writers such as Peter Carey (whom Laura E. Savu [2009] has called the literary son of Dickens [163]), A.S. Byatt, Charles Palliser, Margaret Forster, Matthew Kneale and Tom Holland – points to ‘the ambiguous kinship’ that exists ‘between contemporary fiction and its illustrious ancestor’ (186-187). Other critics also identify ‘ambiguity’ as one of the most important characteristics of the neo-Victorian. Indeed, neo-Victorian novels often present mixed, even contradictory views of their forebears and can be at once admiring and highly critical of the Victorian past. Criticism of the genre has often tried to parse this ambiguity with a variety of binary opposites: fidelity/betrayal, submission/destruction, pastiche/parody, nostalgia/criticism, conservative/subversive and inheritance/burden. These pairs (and there are many more) share one thing in common: they

the present has dropped off’ (8). An association between the nineteenth century and the Golden Age is also made in A.S. Byatt’s Booker-Prize shortlisted neo-Victorian novel *The Children’s Book* (2010[2009]), which is structured with the periodical terms ‘Beginnings’, ‘The Golden Age’ (which covers the majority of the nineteenth-century narrative), ‘The Silver Age’ (the Edwardian period) and ‘The Age of Lead’ (the First World War). Most tellingly, the narrator explicitly links the nineteenth century with the Golden Age in the following: ‘Backwards and forwards, both. The Edwardians knew they came *after* something. [...] They looked back. They stared and glared backwards, in an intense, sometimes powerful nostalgia for an imagined Golden Age’ (391, emphasis original). While many consider the nineteenth century as the high point of the novel, Robin Gilmour in his article ‘Using the Victorians: the Victorian Age in Contemporary Fiction’ (2000) perceptively points out that *now* is ‘a Golden Age in the popular publishing of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction’ (198) because of the expansion of education and the advance of cheap printing. That the nineteenth century was ‘the first era in which female authorship was no longer in some sense anomalous’ (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000[1979]:xi) means that it was a defining moment for women’s fiction as well as the novel as a whole.

²⁰ Grace Moore (2008) writes that Victorian revisionism has become ‘a much more global phenomenon’, citing writers from Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, India and North America (137). Kate Mitchell in *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* (2010) adds Africa-America and Egypt to the list (2-3). Dianne F. Sadoff explores the related phenomenon of writers from ‘the Dominion nations writing back to the British Empire’ in her essay ‘The Neo-Victorian Nation at Home and Abroad’ (2010), focusing on Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and its contemporary reworkings, Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Lloyd Jones’s *Mister Pip* (2006). In ‘Tipoo’s Tiger on the Loose: Neo-Victorian Witness-Bearing and the Trauma of the Indian Mutiny’ (2010), Marie-Louise Kohlke further broadens the definition of neo-Victorian texts by embracing ‘historical fiction re-creating the nineteenth century and its ideological concerns from latter-day perspectives, irrespective of writers’ nationalities or texts’ particular geographical settings’ (369).

all attempt to unpack the *ambiguous* or *ambivalent* relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian; specifically, they seek to understand the negotiations between past and present, source and originality, aggression and admiration. Much of the critical analysis of neo-Victorian fiction correctly identifies the ambiguity and ambivalence of the genre towards the past yet does not provide a convincing explanation for the root of this ambiguity; in short, it does not explain why the neo-Victorian genre as a whole demonstrates both admiration and revulsion towards its source material. My proposed theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism which I propose provides an explanation for the genesis of this ambivalence and a model to understand the relationship between the Victorian and the neo-Victorian.

ii. Dressing up as the ancestors

In order to develop a theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism and to formulate an internally coherent model for the interpretation of the genre, I draw inspiration from Freud's idea of the 'totem', and in particular, the 'totem meal', both of which are outlined in *Totem and Taboo* (1919).²¹ According to Freud,

The clan totem is revered by a body of men and women who call themselves by the name of the totem, believe themselves to be of one blood, descendants of a common ancestor, and are bound together by common obligations to each other and by a common faith in the totem. (103)

Particularly interesting in this description of the clan totem is the issue of naming. According to Fraser, "'Totem'" is on the one hand, a group name, and, on the other, a name indicative of ancestry. In the latter connection it has also a mythological significance' (qtd. in Freud, 1919:106). Freud's notions of the clan and of naming the totem can be applied to the relationship between neo-Victorian and Victorian fiction. In the simplest sense, the contemporary genre and its predecessor can be viewed as belonging to the same novelistic clan, with the Victorian ancestor as the 'clan totem'. Although it may be problematic to see the neo-Victorian genre in terms of a united clan – because the movement is made up of individual writers and critics expressing subjective and divergent ideas – it is also clear that a genre has emerged and that many novelists have chosen to engage with the Victorian in their

²¹ Other scholars have used Freud's ideas to understand the neo-Victorian genre. Cora Kaplan in *Victoriana* (2007) discusses contemporary 'violent responses' to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in terms of Freud's idea of hysteria (15-36). Dianne Sadoff, Elodie Rousselot and Ann Heilmann in their respective essays collected in *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: the Politics of Bearing After-Witness to Nineteenth-Century Suffering* (2010) evoke the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (a deferred emotional response to an incident) to read some neo-Victorian novels.

work. The writers themselves may not be conscious of the term ‘neo-Victorian’ when writing, but they are likely aware of at least some of the body of neo-Victorian fiction and the trend as a whole.²² This tendency has been identified by critics and academics, which has resulted in an effort to make neo-Victorian fiction a literary category worthy of scholarly attention. Several critics have pointed out that the genre is now a widespread and recognisable phenomenon, in both mainstream publishing and academia. Fiona Tolan (2010) believes that ‘The reproduction and reconstruction of Victorian styles and sensibilities has become a phenomenon of recent publishing’ (28) and Ann Schwan (2011) writes, ‘Alongside a spurt of neo-Victorian fiction over the last ten years, the academic subfield of neo-Victorian studies has come into its own’ (161). Louisa Hadley in *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010) also emphasises the unique qualities of the genre and its criticism, noting that in the recent years ‘there has been a shift towards recognising neo-Victorian fiction as a distinct creative practice requiring its own critical assessment’ (5).

In the term ‘neo-Victorian’, we also see Freud’s notion of the members of the clan naming themselves after the totem. Just as the members call themselves by a name derived from that of the totem, writers and more often, critics and academics, use the term ‘neo-Victorian’ to refer to novels that are at least partly indebted to nineteenth-century literary conventions. In so doing, they incorporate ‘Victorian’ as a kind of laudatory totem; as Christopher Kent (2004) writes, ‘*Victorian* is a valuable cultural and commercial [...] franchise’ (216-217, emphasis original). Interestingly, although critics have often used names other than ‘neo-Victorian’ to refer to the genre, their terminology almost always includes some variation of ‘Victorian’. In her essay ‘(Re-)Workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts’ (2008), Andrea Kirchknopf asks ‘Is it *Victoriana*, *Victoriographies*, *retro-*, *neo-* or *post-Victorian novels* we encounter when we read rewritings of the Victorian era?’ (59). Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn in *Neo-Victorianism* (2010) write, ‘The term “neo-Victorian” has been adopted in academic studies in favour of the earlier “post-Victorian” (presumably because of its potential ahistoricity) and “retro”/“faux-Victorian”, which imply an overt nostalgia for the period’ (5).²³ That all these terms collectively utilise

²² Margaret D. Stetz (2012) writes in her informative review essay: ‘At least for now, this term for the genre [i.e. ‘neo-Victorian’] remains largely unused by writers, readers, reviewers, librarians, or booksellers outside of academe’ (339). Despite this, unfamiliarity with the term ‘neo-Victorian’ does not preclude writers identifying with a distinctive trend.

²³ Also see Margaret D. Stetz (2012) for a discussion of the naming of the genre. That ‘Neo-Victorian’ is now the commonly accepted term is suggested by the founding of the *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* in Autumn 2008.

‘Victorian’ speaks to not only a kind of academic brand development but the structural dependence the later trend has on the previous mode. It also demonstrates the contemporary’s *self-appointed* connection with that particular historical period.²⁴ The self-proclaimed identity of the ‘neo-Victorian’ is one created by critics and authors to shape, develop and safeguard the genre’s continual existence in publishing and academia.

Freud’s comment on the clansman’s imitation of the totem resonates with some characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction. He writes, ‘the clansman seeks to emphasise his kinship with the totem by making himself resemble it externally, by dressing in the skin of the animal’ (105). This totem ‘animal’, according to Freud, is ‘in reality a substitute for the father’ (141). In another passage, he expands: ‘The clansmen are there, dressed in the likeness of the totem and imitating it in sound and movement, as though they are seeking to stress their identity with it’ (140). Such performative – almost theatrical – acts are central to neo-Victorian fiction, a genre which at least partially relies on the ‘success’ of its imitation and recreation of a past style.²⁵ To evoke a certain Victorian aura and to identify with their literary ancestors, neo-Victorian writers often employ a range of broadly recognisable nineteenth-century linguistic, narrative and stylistic codes and conventions, such as formality of language, lexical choice, syntactical patterning, characterisation, thought and speech representation and narrative structure. However, contemporary writers do not necessarily strive to recreate a style or texture that completely resembles that of the nineteenth century, either due to their artistic limitations or, more importantly, because it is not their ultimate goal. (That said, some writers do endeavour to create a pattern very close to the Victorian. A.S. Byatt comes to mind.) The ‘success’ in imitating a past form that I referred to does not indicate a total correspondence between the neo-Victorian style evoked by contemporary writers and ‘genuine’ or ‘authentic’ Victorian style. Instead, it refers to the writers’ success in

²⁴ In *Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (2007), Simon Joyce uses ‘Neo-Dickensian’ to refer to a number of contemporary novels which ‘[return] to Dickens as a stylistic model’ (142). He considers, among others, John Irving’s *Cider House Rules* (1985), Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Sarah Waters’s *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) as neo-Dickensian novels. In her essay ‘Neo-Victorian Dickens’ (2011), Cora Kaplan also employs the term ‘Neo-Dickensian’ to refer to Waters’s *Fingersmith* (2002), Peter Ackroyd’s *Dickens* (1990), Carey’s *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Lloyd Jones’s *Mister Pip* (2006).

²⁵ There are exceptions. Neo-Victorian novels that adopt dual time-lines feature passages written in both the Victorian and contemporary styles. Examples include Lindsay Clarke’s *The Chymical Wedding* (1989), A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990), Graham Swift’s *Ever After* (1992), Katharine McMahon’s *Confinement* (1998), D.M. Thomas’s *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000), Scarlett Thomas’s *The End of Mr Y* (2006) and Jean-Pierre Ohl’s *Mr Dick or The Tenth Book* (2008). Novels that do not use a Victorian temporal setting or nineteenth century stylistic conventions but are clearly influenced by and in dialogue with Victorian works and authors are also common, including Peter Ackroyd’s *The Great Fire of London* (1982), David Benedictus’s *Floating Down to Camelot* (1985), David Lodge’s *Nice Work* (1988), Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty* (2004), A.N. Wilson’s *A Jealous Ghost* (2005) and Lloyd Jones’s *Mister Pip* (2006).

convincing readers that what they are reading is Victorian *enough*. Interestingly, to achieve a sense of Victorianness, novelists not only imitate nineteenth-century style but may even deliberately use anachronistic elements. John Fowles, author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), for instance, admits to forsaking authenticity to meet contemporary readers' expectations about what Victorian dialogue should sound like. This sometimes involves over emphasising archaic and formal linguistic patterns in order 'to get it to sound right' (Campbell, 1976:464) because as Fowles (1977[1969]) explains, 'the genuine dialogue of 1867 (in so far as it can be heard in books of the time) is far too close to our own to sound convincingly old. It very often fails to agree with our psychological picture of the Victorians – it is not stiff enough, not euphemistic enough, and so on' (139).²⁶

In addition to using past elements, some neo-Victorian writers may also overtly employ modernist and postmodernist techniques in their predominantly Victorian narratives, such as multiple points of view, fragmentary structures and self-reflexivity. 'Make it neo' (to borrow Ezra Pound's famous slogan for modernist literature, 'make it new') means that the writing in neo-Victorian fiction need only be Victorian *up to a point*, just as the resemblance between the totem and the clansman who dons the totem's skin – a kind of cross-dressing – is likely to be superficial.²⁷ Contemporary writers' imitation of the Victorian image is selective and self-interested. They copy and alter the totem to meet their individual artistic needs or to reflect contemporary concerns. Although the genre as a whole may look to the Victorian for inspiration, each writer uses the past in their own way and for their own purpose – in order words, while the clan may worship the totem, their acts are mediated by heterogeneous contemporary expectations as well as the subjective experiences and desires of its members.

Apart from dressing up as the totem, the clansman may also seek connection 'by incising a picture of the totem upon his own body' (Freud, 1919:105). This practice strikes a chord with the production of neo-Victorian novels, especially with respect to their nostalgic use of nineteenth-century visual elements. On this point, Gutleben's discussion of the outward design of neo-Victorian novels and of their marketing and promotional material is germane.

²⁶ See 'Contemporary Victorian-centred Novels: a Comparative Study of Fowles's *French Lieutenant's Woman* and Byatt's *Possession*' (Ho, 2007) for a discussion of the authors' use of mimetic techniques to recreate a nineteenth-century aura in their neo-Victorian works.

²⁷ The practice of writers 'cross-dressing' their novels in the likeness of their forebears has also identified by Kate Mitchell (2010a) when she questions: 'Can these novels recreate the past in a meaningful way or are they playing nineteenth-century dress-ups?' (3) Likewise, Suzanne Keen (2001) writes of the work of A.S. Byatt that '*Possession* uses the past [...] for the dressing-up fun of imitating the Victorians' (34).

He recognises that the novels ‘really use advertising methods to place the Victorian image at the core of their ornamentations and focus the readers’ attention on this guarantee of accepted quality’ (46). These ‘ornementations’ include the use of Victorian maps within the texts and pictures or paintings from the nineteenth century in sleeve design. In this sense, a neo-Victorian novel is very much like a clansman in Freud’s description – both inscribe on their body the ancestor’s image as an indication of their kinship. Conversely, contemporary writers and scholars may also be seen to incise *themselves* upon the body of the Victorian totem. Stephanie Bolster explores this idea in her neo-Victorian poem ‘Portrait of Alice, Annotated’ (43), which is included in *White Stone* (2005[1998]), a collection inspired by the fictional Alice and her real-life counterpart.²⁸ The poet envisions gender non-specific critics physically annotating Alice:

PORTRAIT OF ALICE, ANNOTATED

Who was it strung these footnotes
from her toes and scribbled
italics on her wrists, indicating perhaps
that only slim-wristed girls
were allowed to enter Wonderland?

They wound her with measuring tape,
noted the resulting data on her skin, figures
for chest and waist identical. To her mouth
was taped a parchment proclamation
detailing origins of those words she spoke

as if they were as intimately hers
as earlobes. But the evidence proved
those words had a long history of their own,
belonged to themselves and would
outlive her. Whatever she had said

to end up in this predicament
was not her fault, she was exempt, thus safe.
What could be done to her now? Even her breasts
Were claimed before they’d risen; some said
he’d placed his nitrate-ridden hands there.

The critics overwrote each other

²⁸ Alice and her relationship with Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson) is the subject of several neo-Victorian novels: Penelope Fitzgerald’s *The Blue Flower* (1997), Katie Roiphe’s *Still She Haunts Me* (2001) and Benjamin Melanie’s *Alice I Have Been* (2009). Also see Kali Israel’s ‘Asking Alice: Victorian and Other Alices in Contemporary Culture’ (2000), in *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*, eds. John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff.

till all their words were tattooed black
upon her. *Have mercy*, she cried as they came
with the thousand-volumed weight of archives,
but those words were not hers either.

In the poem's description of the scholars' treatment of Alice, her body parts (toes, wrists, mouth, skin, chest, waist, earlobes and breasts) are fetishised. The girl, under intense academic scrutiny, is a tortured subject. Footnotes like iron shackles tighten around her toes, while her mouth is taped over with a parchment so she cannot speak. The idea of 'tattooing' (L22) in the last stanza is particularly loaded. Tattoos can be seen an art form, the body a flesh canvas on which ink patterns are drawn. However, Bolster seems to suggest that instead of turning Alice into art, the black ink the critics tattoo on Alice is like a slave mark. The girl is written on, literally, and branded for eternal life. Here, we see contemporary critics writing over the top of a Victorian character. In some way, this reverses Freud's notion of the clansmen incising the totem's image on their own bodies; the annotators of the poem are act more like tribesmen carving their own words onto the totem. There is also a hint of sexual abuse in the last lines: the critics only stop spilling ink when 'all their words were tattooed black upon her' (L22) and 'they came / with the thousand-volumed weight of archives' (L23-L24). Bolster imagines Alice helpless and begging for leniency: '*Have mercy*, she cried' (L23). By adopting the poetic mode to narrate Alice's experience, Bolster seems to prefer the reimagination of the character through poetry as opposed to critical analysis, which in the work is likened to bodily dissection. In the last line, she writes that even the words 'Have mercy' are not Alice's own – 'those words were not hers either' (L25) – suggesting that the girl is completely mute, her subjectivity overwhelmed by the critics' gang domination. There is, however, a hypocritical element here, for Alice's words are of course Bolster's. It is the poet who cannibalises Alice in her own work and scatters the girl's body parts throughout the lines. While ostensibly commenting on the critics' forceful treatment of Alice, Bolster the poet is guilty of the same cruelty.

iii. Eating the ancestors

For both the clansmen and neo-Victorian novels, the desire for connection with the totem occurs on a far more fundamental level, well beyond the relatively superficial practices described above. Both Freud's clansmen and neo-Victorian novels seek communion with the totem by incorporating their ancestors *inside* their own bodies; that is, they cannibalise their

predecessors in the process of identification. According to Freud, the clansmen have a ‘totem meal’ in which the clan commits ‘the cruel slaughter of its totem animal’, which is in fact the substitution of the father, and devours it ‘raw—blood, flesh and bones’ (140).²⁹ Freud psychoanalyses this meal:

Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. (142)

Freud’s ideas again find echoes in Gutleben’s notion of the Victorian novelist as ‘mythic ancestor’ of the neo-Victorian writer, especially his argument that contemporary writers are often envious of their literary predecessors, and that the relationship between the two is complicated. Gutleben’s analysis, however, does not include the notions of the ‘totem meal’ or of cannibalism, central to Freud’s understanding of the relationship between the clansmen and their ancestors. On the most basic level, cannibalism is understood to be the practice of consuming the body of your own kind. I believe that this sense of cannibalism can be applied to literary works, which can be seen as a type of body that can consume and be consumed. The term ‘body’ is often used to describe a writer’s collected works or the works of a period. In this sense, it is possible to think of writers and books which incorporate or rework portions of earlier novels as consuming the ‘bodies’ of those works.

More specifically, this literary cannibalism is a kind of transgenerational and transgressive endocannibalism; it is the eating of members of one’s own kin.³⁰ Although it is possible to apply this idea to many forms of literary incorporation, it is especially suited to the relationship between the neo-Victorian and Victorian. Neo-Victorian fiction is inherently endocannibalistic, and just like Freud’s tribesmen, its writers cannibalise their Victorian predecessors precisely in order to absorb their power in terms of literary accomplishment, canonical power and prestige. According to Maggie Kilgour (1998), endocannibalism is ‘a way of absorbing the individual into the community’ (247). The reverse is also true:

²⁹ ‘Bones’ here brings to mind T.S. Eliot’s essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1982[1919]), in which he writes that ‘the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones’ (37). Eliot believes that the whole of European literature and literature of one’s own culture should be incorporated.

³⁰ This is contrasted with exocannibalism, which is the consumption of members outside one’s own clan, usually enemies. To a certain extent, the Victorian can also be regarded as the contemporary’s ‘enemy’. Copyright-free Victorian works and previously out-of-print texts are now readily available in the form of inexpensive print editions and free electronic versions, which ‘supplement and extend our knowledge of the nineteenth century’ (Moore, 2011:630). These Victorian works compete with contemporary ones for market space and readership.

endocannibalism is a way for the individual to absorb the community into him- or herself. Of course, contemporary writers' appetite for the Victorian is in no small part urged on by their readers' appetite for the same.³¹ In the case of neo-Victorian novels, then, their writers' and readers' *tastes* coincide and feed on one another. Although to a certain extent all contemporary authors can be said to consume the substance of their literary ancestors for existence (for example, for inspiration and models), neo-Victorian novels are particularly aggressive in their cannibalism, as they must live directly off the 'body' of Victorian literature. Indeed, without the Victorian the neo-Victorian cannot exist and, as a result, it is constantly engaged in the consumption of the body of nineteenth-century work in a kind of textual meal.

Considering its cannibalistic nature, it is perhaps telling that food-related terms and ideas are popular in neo-Victorian fiction and in critical discussion of the genre. Although it is true that food metaphors are common in every day speech and critical discussions, the prevalence of these expressions in analyses of the neo-Victorian is suggestive. Critics have long applied food-related terminology in reference to the nature of the genre. The metaphor of eating Victorian literature is used by Cora Kaplan (2007) in a discussion of Jane Campion's film *The Piano* (1990): 'As well as titbits of Thomas Hood's poetry and a pick-and-mix buffet of social and cultural history, the film seems to have swallowed whole a Penguin library of classic nineteenth-century novels in English, disgorging their parts into the narrative' (123).³² Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010) likewise contend that D.J. Taylor's neo-Victorian novel *Kept* (2006) is 'literally devouring the literature from which it is born and on which it feeds' (17). In a similar vein, Merlin Holland, Oscar Wilde's grandson, describes his principle in the writing of *Coffee With Oscar Wilde* (2007): 'to boil all the ingredients up together so that they still have the flavour of Oscar Wilde' (11). Some authors and critics

³¹ A number of critics have suggested that the neo-Victorian genre has emerged partly as a result of readers' appetite for Victorian culture. Sally Shuttleworth (1998), when discussing A.S. Byatt's 'Morpho Eugenia' (1992) and Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992), writes, 'the reading public has an insatiable appetite for high-brow historical novels and Darwinian biographies and television spectacles' (254). Jeanette King (2005) comments that 'the appetite for knowledge of the past' (3) contributes to the trend of neo-Victorian fiction, while Louisa Hadley (2010) contends, 'the popularity of neo-Victorian fiction suggests that the reading public's appetite for Victorian stories has not yet been satiated' (141). Lastly, Fiona Tolan (2010) believes that 'the fascination with the mid-to-late nineteenth century extends beyond contemporary literature' and that the vast number of filmic and TV adaptations of Victorian novels 'point to a voracious appetite for Victoriana' (30). This collective acknowledgement of the contemporary 'appetite' for the Victorian – subconsciously epicurean – is fascinatedly cannibalist of the past.

³² The 'pick-and-mix buffet' imagery is also used by Heta Pyrhönen in *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and Its Progeny* (2010) when she notes that Emma Tennan's *Adèle: The Hidden Story of Jane Eyre* (2002), a text discussed in Chapter Three, has 'constru[ed] heritage as a collation of prizes, texts, images, and types from which one may pick and choose one's plateful' (116).

have gone beyond food-related descriptions of the genre, and have written overtly in terms of cannibalism. In some cases, contemporary novelists are conscious of their own cannibalism of their Victorian predecessors. A number have described their use of Victorian material as cannibalistic or have used cannibalism as a trope in their work. In the 'Afterword' to *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), J.G. Farrell lists some of the writers he has 'cannibalised' (314) and Maryse Condé, when asked about her adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), responds: 'There is a strong tradition of what is called literary cannibalism in the Caribbean. Many people have done that before me' (qtd. in Wolff, 1999).³³ More significantly, the trope of cannibalism has also informed the subject matter of neo-Victorian novels such as David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Robert Edric's *The Book of the Heathen* (2000), Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008), Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008), Dan Simmon's *Drood* (2009) and Carol Birch's *Jamrach's Menagerie* (2011). This overt attraction to the taboo subject of cannibalism and its presence in a range of narratives provide a self-reflexive comment on the contemporary writers' consumption and incorporation of the Victorian. Celia Wallhead and Marie-Luise Kohlke (2010), for example, identify this self-reflexivity in *Cloud Atlas*: 'The palindrome structure of the novel means that the nineteenth-century section both feeds and feeds off – via intratextual cannibalism/vampiricism – the subsequent traumas' (227).

The intertextual nature of neo-Victorian novels highlights the fact that they demonstrate characteristics of the postmodern, a cultural trend often read as cannibalistic, most famously by Fredric Jameson. The postmodern, to Jameson (1984), exemplifies 'the random cannibalisation of all the styles of the past' (8). Dana Shiller takes issue with this view of postmodernism's random consumption of past styles, seeing contemporary writers, especially those of neo-Victorian works, as more selective in their consumption of history. In the article 'The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel' (1997), she responds to Jameson's notion of postmodern cannibalism and argues that neo-Victorian novels such as A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* (1987) retrieve the *substance* instead of

³³ Maryse Condé's opinion is in line with a wider trend among Caribbean writers to describe their literary production as cannibalistic. Carine M. Mardorossian in her PhD thesis *Cannibalizing the Victorians: Racial and Cultural Hybridity in the Brontës and Their Caribbean Rewritings* (1998) contends that the term cannibalism 'has been reclaimed by Caribbean thinkers and writers alike to signify the inflection and "cannibalisation" of Western myths by a West Indian sensibility' (3). It should be mentioned that Mardorossian explores 'cannibalism' primarily in relation to hybridity. She writes, 'In using the loaded concept "cannibalising" to name my project, I am evoking not the act of savagery and destruction it signifies in the Western imaginary [...] but the productive process of hybridity it has come to mean in Caribbean redeployments of the term' (3).

merely the looks of the past. Unlike Shiller, I do not find it fundamentally misguided to interpret the neo-Victorian as cannibalistic; I fall between Shiller and Jameson. I believe that neo-Victorian fiction cannibalises past styles, although a distinction ought to be made between postmodernism's 'random' cannibalism and neo-Victorian fiction's clearly conscious and selective consumption of nineteenth-century elements. Contemporary writers do not cannibalise everything Victorian, instead they have discriminating tastes and only assimilate substances deemed useful and 'nutritious', including literary techniques, famous authors and characters, plots, historical facts and ideologies.

Indeed, even the neo-Victorian's choice of the Victorian as its *particular* food-source is indicative that the genre is highly selective in its cannibalisation. The desire to regain the Golden Age has 'suffuse[d] literature—since Hesiod and Ovid' (Warner, 2002:73) and as mentioned before, the Victorian represents the Golden Age of the novel, and so using it as a source of sustenance is a natural choice. The neo-Victorian thus often incorporates the most canonical nineteenth-century authors and texts, that is, items considered to be *inside* the body of the nineteenth-century tradition.³⁴ By cannibalising the Victorian canon, the most successful works of the novel's Golden Age, we see neo-Victorian fiction seeking communion not with all ancestors but with those it deems the greatest. And just as Freud's tribesmen undertake cannibalistic rituals within the confines of the tribe to gain strength, neo-Victorian novels cannibalise Victorian authors, themes, structures, plots and settings as a means of seeking their own place within the wider literary tradition, and even within the canon.³⁵ Cannibalism configured in this way promotes continuity between the literary past

³⁴ The connection between the canon and contemporary literature can be seen in John Thieme's *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing back to the Canon* (2001) and Susana Onega and Christian Gutleben's edited volume *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (2004). Laura E. Savu's *Postmortem Postmodernists: The Afterlife of the Author in Recent Narrative* (2009) also explores the afterlife of canonical authors in contemporary British and American fiction (9). In Gutleben's own *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001), the discussion almost always surrounds the contemporary's relationship with Victorian canonical works and authors, while Grace Moore in 'Twentieth-Century Re-Workings of the Victorian Novel' (2008) sees 'a postcolonial backlash against a continuing valorisation of the English literary canon' (134) as one of the reasons for neo-Victorian writings.

³⁵ Paul Delany (1991) remarks that in *Possession* A.S. Byatt 'slides her texts into the Victorian canon' (22). That *Possession* has been adapted for the screen, a treatment many Victorian classics have received, perhaps also speaks to its social canonicity. In the process of being turned into films or television programmes, neo-Victorian texts 'become subject to the same marketing principles as Victorian novels' and the adaptations 'often collapse the distinction between the Victorian and the neo-Victorian' (Hadley, 2010:142). While contemporary works like Byatt's may find a place in the Victorian tradition, others have achieved canonical status in the emerging neo-Victorian canon, which is in part built on the Victorian model. Mark Llewellyn (2010) describes two of Byatt's works: 'Like her earlier novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990), A.S. Byatt's novella 'Morpho Eugenia' (1992), a tale of science and incest, has become a key item in the growing canon of neo-Victorian literature' (133). Anne Schwan (2011) also mentions a 'widening' neo-Victorian canon in her review of Ann Heilmann

and present, just as cannibalism and the totem meal provides the clan with a link to its history and traditions. Ingestion of Victorian novels, that is, consumption of the tribal stock, serves to prolong the afterlife of nineteenth-century literature and perpetuate the Victorian canon. Yet while the act of cannibalism may help propagate tradition, it is also partly exploitative of the Victorian. Neo-Victorian works consume the body of nineteenth-century literature for its cultural capital and prestige. This is undoubtedly partly done for self-interested reasons and the commercial viability of the Victorian form. In perhaps a self-reflexive comment on his own motivations for writing a neo-Victorian novel, A.N. Wilson in *Who Was Oswald Fish?* (1981) has one character suggest that the obsession with the nineteenth century could be motivated by its 'profit potential' or 'market feasibility' (19). Commercial considerations, needless to say, are important for the neo-Victorian genre and in some ways motivate its novelists to choose the Victorian as their source of inspiration. However, neo-Victorian writers' cannibalism is also driven by a desire to commune with their greatest ancestors and in so doing, find a place within the larger canon.

iv. A new identity

The desire for identification and communion with the Victorian motivates neo-Victorian cannibalism; this consumption is also driven by a wish for identity-formation. Contemporary writers look to the Victorian for sustenance and inspiration but they are also aware of the need to forge their own individuality and express contemporary concerns. As such, their texts are not solely imitations of the Victorian but are new forms that are belated, haunted, refracted, evolved, remembered, *different*.³⁶ In other words, neo-Victorian writers want to be like their Victorian literary ancestors and at the same time *different* from them.

and Mark Llewellyn's *Neo-Victorianism* (2011) and Margaret D. Stetz (2012) likewise writes that 'a canon already is forming in this very new field of neo-Victorian studies' (344) in her review essay on the genre.

³⁶ For a discussion of the figure of the ghost and the metaphor of haunting in neo-Victorian fiction see Tatiana Kontou's *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (2009), Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham's edited volume *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010) and Justin Sausman's 'Where are the Dead? A Genealogy of Mediumship in Victoria Glendinning's *Electricity*' in María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren's edited collection *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture* (2010).

See Susana Onegán and Christian Gutleben's edited collection *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (2004) for the use of the optical metaphor of refraction in the study of neo-Victorian fiction. In the chapter 'Spectrality and S(p)ecularity: Some Reflections in the Glass' in *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010), Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn discuss 'a specific metaphorical objectification – that of glass', which 'permits a refracted and reflective negotiation of issues of belief and faith to be provided [...] via the divergent nature of those 'glassworlds' for different (re)interpretations in and of the period' (147).

Here we see the central ambiguity of the neo-Victorian genre – it desires a distinct identity, but it relies directly on its consumption of an established genre to achieve it. Maggie Kilgour's *From Communion to Cannibalism* (1990) provides a useful insight into this ambivalence. She identifies a close connection between identity-fashioning and consumption, a process which can be seen as fraught and dangerous. She writes that 'the eater is not himself in turn eaten but secures his own identity by absorbing the world outside himself' (6-7). That is to say, in order to maintain one's identity and coherent self, it is of utmost importance that one is not totally identified with the other, for that would amount to being eaten. Neo-Victorian fiction, too, cannot commune with Victorian fiction wholly; otherwise it will lose its unique identity. Yet for Kilgour, consumption of the old, although potentially dangerous, is also essential to forming a new identity; after all, we need food to survive and grow. Kilgour points out that there is a long tradition of poets incorporating the work of their predecessors to form new literary expressions:

In the Renaissance especially, a common way of expressing the relationship between a poet and an earlier source was in terms of eating. In order to create his own poetic identity, the later poet absorbs the substances of his predecessors. So, in his *Discoveries*, Jonson claims that the poet must 'be able to convert the substance, or riches of another poet, to his own use'. (104-105)

Samuel Butler (1926), when comparing his own plain-language translation of the *Odyssey* with the mock-archaic translation of Andrew Lang, agrees, 'If you wish to preserve the spirit of a dead author, you must not skin him, stuff him, and set him up in a case. You must eat him, digest him, and let him live in you, with such life as you have, for better or worse' (197). Butler adds that Lang's intention is to 'preserve a corpse' while his is 'to originate a new life and one that is instinct [...] with the spirit though not the form of the original' (ibid.).

Likewise, in order to create a new identity, neo-Victorian fiction incorporates and transforms its predecessor's substance – to return to the old in order to make it new: a Janus-faced genre. As I have noted, this consumption of the past is selective, and not all Victorian elements are deemed suitable for incorporation. Stylistically speaking, contemporary writers may also use modernist and postmodernist tenets in their work, thus creating 'a new type of

In a discussion of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Joseph Wiesenfarth (2008) writes, 'Fowles's attempt to give new life to an old form is an attempt to produce a mutation in the species *novel* by making the form of Victorian fiction serve the purposes of life as it is now lived' (213, emphasis original). See Kate Mitchell's *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages* (2010) for the use of memory discourse in the reading of neo-Victorian literature.

postmodernism' (Gutleben, 2001:219). Thematically, neo-Victorian novelists reject many Victorian ideologies and theories and prefer instead to see the Victorian through contemporary concerns and social norms. A prominent characteristic of neo-Victorian fiction is its focus on feminist and postcolonial critiques.³⁷ Gutleben (2001) points out that the neo-Victorian's use of 'the voices of those ethically, socially or sexually underprivileged characters which are either marginalised or excluded from the body of Victorian fiction clearly differ from and play havoc with the voices of the canon' (37). The inclusion in the body of neo-Victorian fiction of these new elements that are scarce or nonexistent in the Victorian, it may be argued, is one of the most obvious manifestations of the genre's search for a new identity. The use of marginalised voices often undermines Victorian ideologies surrounding woman, race and imperialism, thus allowing neo-Victorian authors to express an identity separate from their ancestors. To this same end, contemporary authors may also distort the plots of Victorian novels or provide monstrous characterisations of famous nineteenth-century celebrities and fictional characters. In summary, neo-Victorian writers consume and digest the body of Victorian works and simultaneously fill out their diet with modern techniques and contemporary concerns to fuel their own aesthetic identity.

v. Aggressive ambivalence

The contemporary's cannibalism of the Victorian has two motivations: to commune with the Victorian model on the one hand and to create a new identity through the absorption of elements of the very same model on the other. In some ways, this seems paradoxical and irreconcilable and creates a kind of dilemma for the neo-Victorian novelists. I believe that

³⁷ Some neo-Victorian novels are overt feminist re-writings of nineteenth-century canonical works. Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Hilary Bailey's *Mrs Rochester* (1997), D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte* (2000) and Emma Tennant's *Tess* (1993) are a few of the better-known examples. Such novels have led to feminist studies on neo-Victorian fiction including Jeannette King's *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (2005), Diana Wallace's *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (2005) and Rosemary Erickson Johnsen's *Contemporary Feminist Historical Crime Fiction* (2006). B.E. Maidment (2001), however, is doubtful about contemporary interest in Victorian sexuality, recognising that 'Such a process involves the construction of a repression/transgression dialectic which, far from promoting understanding of the Victorians, uses them, crassly, as a site for the projection of contemporary preoccupations with deviance, guilt and self-fulfilment' (158) – in other words, Victorian as a space for fantasy.

A number of neo-Victorian novels have also redressed the past from a postcolonial perspective. An example is Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), an imagining of what happens to the convict Magwitch after his fleeing to Australia in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860-61). Cora Kaplan (2007) has noticed an ambiguity in the attempt by postcolonial neo-Victorian novels or 'Anti-imperial Victoriana', to use her term, to criticise the British empire. Although such works often set out to 'write back' against colonialism, they still 'privilege the story of European settlers over that of the non-white or indigenous population of the colonies' (155). Instead of truly giving voice to the colonised subjects, these texts merely magnify their existence while continuing to put the spotlight on characters originating from the empire.

these contemporary writers have aesthetic and artistic aspirations and therefore ‘the very existence of a past creates the necessity for difference – not for the audience, not *sub specie aeternitatis*, but for the writer and artist himself’ (Bate, 1971:31). If the neo-Victorian writer imitates the Victorian too closely (total communion), he or she risks their work becoming little more than pastiche. If the novelist embraces the contemporary too closely, the work could lose all semblance of the Victorian and no longer fit the genre comfortably. The stronger the contemporary writers’ instinctual desire and anxiety to establish a difference from their predecessors (while at the same time imitating them), the more vigorous and aggressive their approach in appropriating or ‘misreading’ (to use Bloom’s term) the Victorian elements would be. It is the opposing directions that contribute to the ambiguity of the neo-Victorian genre’s relationship with its Victorian model, a relationship I describe as ‘aggressive ambivalence’. Neo-Victorian novels demonstrate a desire to emulate the literary accomplishments of their Victorian forebears but this desire is tainted with a distrust and disgust of the era and its authors (and possibly a certain level of self-disgust). The neo-Victorian embraces Victorian fiction by consuming its literary styles, plots and techniques (communion), while aggressively criticising Victorian ideologies through contemporary theoretical paradigms and by seeking to undermine the success of Victorian authors and their works (identity-formation). In both their search for communion and identity-formation, they are aggressive, simultaneously pushing away and enthusiastically embracing their ancestors’ influence. Cannibalism provides an apt metaphor to explain this aggressive ambivalence, itself an ambivalent and violent practice; one takes in as well as destroys its food and ‘even the most apparently benign acts of eating involve aggression, even cannibalism’ (Kilgour, 1990:7). More fundamentally, cannibalism also provides a theoretical basis for both the neo-Victorian’s desire to commune with the Victorian, seen in Freud’s totem meal, and the conflicting need to form a self identity, seen in Kilgour’s discussion of artistic incorporation.

III. The chapters: An outline

Although I believe the neo-Victorian genre as a whole can be characterised as aggressively ambivalent towards the Victorian, it is important to note that individual novels embody this ambivalence to different extents and intensities. Each demonstrates its own pattern of negotiation and struggle between the two coexisting motivations of cannibalism – communion and identity-formation. The treatment of the Victorian sources in the texts can thus range from respectful and affectionate to highly dismissive and aggressive and far and wide in between. In some cases this negotiation may even demonstrate itself in overt

references to cannibalism/vampirism or in self- or sub-conscious descriptions of the cannibalistic nature of the writer's own work.

In this thesis, I will investigate how different neo-Victorian novels negotiate the conflicting desires of communion and identity-formation, and will explore themes of cannibalism within the texts. The neo-Victorian texts chosen include earlier works in the genre and relatively recent ones and are written by writers of different nationalities. Some of the texts have received ample academic attention while others have been less examined. The chapters are divided in order to focus on thematic pairings of Victorian and contemporary texts (and authors-as-texts). The pairings demonstrate the cannibalism of a specific element of the Victorian, for example, author, text and feature of its history, by the neo-Victorian as well as illustrating and elucidating the cannibalistic nature of the genre. The selection of texts, then, apart from reflecting my own taste and cannibalism of the Victorian, also points to the extent to which cannibalism is evident in the genre as a whole.

The theme of cannibalism is manifested in various ways in neo-Victorian works, thereby mirroring the highly aggressive relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian and highlighting the range of subjects and subgenres associated with neo-Victorian fiction. Each chapter in the thesis hinges on one type of 'cannibal' through which the discussion of the theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism is elucidated. The first three chapters can be considered as 'case studies' on literary incorporation. They show how neo-Victorian novels seek to gain strength from worthy Victorian elements while simultaneously criticising or adding twists. Chapter One looks at the phenomenon of incorporating the biographies of Victorian celebrities in neo-Victorian fiction. Using Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2000) and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008), I discuss how Charles Dickens and Sir John Franklin are portrayed as sexually and colonially oppressing Bluebeard cannibals, a form of representation which provides a revisionist critique of the misogynist, oppressive and racist undercurrent of Victorian ideology. Chapter Two examines the vampiric cannibal and analyses three neo-Victorian reworkings of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) – Tom Holland's *Supping With Panthers* (1996), Leslie S. Klinger's *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008) and Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt's *Dracula the Un-Dead* (2009). In these works, the writers simultaneously cannibalise the original text and its author's biography, and in so doing challenge Stoker's authorial power and clear a creative space for themselves. These writers are akin to vampires who live off their literary ancestor's life-blood. Chapter Three reads Charlotte Brontë's *Jane*

Eyre (1847) as an important intertext. The chapter studies the representation of Bertha, a character often painted in cannibalistic terms, in *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and three relatively recent neo-Victorian novels – Lin Haire-Sargeant's *H: The Story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights* (1992), D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000) and Emma Tennant's *Adèle: Jane Eyre's Hidden Story* (2002). I argue that a narrative reorientation away from Bertha in the three later novels, which cannibalise both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, prompts us to reconsider the level of political engagement of the neo-Victorian genre. Chapter Four turns the focus to what I call the 'academic cannibal' and discusses the role of scholarly characters in neo-Victorian novels including A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992), A.N. Wilson's *A Jealous Ghost* (2005), Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2006), Scarlett Thomas's *The End of Mr Y* (2006) and Justine Picardie's *Daphne* (2008). I argue that the use of scholars in these novels reflect a mutual dependence between the neo-Victorian genre and the academy, a relationship that can be viewed as cannibalistic and competitive. Finally, the Conclusion speculates on how under certain circumstances the Victorian can be seen as cannibalising the contemporary and how the relationship between past and present is likely to evolve in the neo-Victorian genre.

CHAPTER ONE

Dickens the Cannibal Cannibalised

‘America was gripped by hysteria. ‘People *eat* him [Dickens] here,’ wrote one sober Bostonian to his father in Washington.’ – Claire Tomalin (2011)

‘How best to approach Charles Dickens? There may be readers who, like the boa-constrictor and the goat, can swallow Dickens whole.’ – John Sutherland (2012)

This chapter reads two neo-Victorian novels which cannibalise Charles Dickens’s biography to facilitate their discussion of topics including gender, sexuality, race and empire. The treatment of Dickens in Gaynor Arnold’s *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) and Richard Flanagan’s *Wanting* (2008) illustrates the theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism I have proposed. Both novelists seek to emulate the accomplishments of the Victorian author (communion) but they are also eager to put forward revisionist ideologies that differentiate and individuate them from their literary ancestor (identity-formation). These conflicting motivations of incorporation are manifest in what I call an ‘aggressive ambivalence’ towards Dickens, especially in his portrayal as a cannibal in both texts. Cannibalism of Dickens leads to sophisticated reconsideration of the Victorian author’s relationships with women, his family and his public in *Girl in a Blue Dress* and is instrumental in a sympathetic postcolonial remembering of the Australian colonial history in *Wanting*. Although Arnold’s and Flanagan’s use of Dickens (and other Victorians, notably Sir John Franklin in *Wanting*) raise certain ethical issues, the writers succeed in simultaneously appropriating the influence of Dickens and creating their own intriguing and redemptive fictions that centre on the theme of cannibalism.

I. Neo-Victorian biofiction

‘[T]he Victorian era is defined by its personalities’ (31), Louisa Hadley writes in *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010). It is perhaps unsurprising that contemporary writers in their attempt to incorporate the best of the Victorian era are drawn to the life stories of identifiable Victorian personae, particularly those with cultural significance. As mentioned in the Introduction, ‘a common way of expressing the relationship between a poet and an earlier source was in terms of incorporation. In order to create his own poetic identity, the later poet absorbs the substances of his predecessors’ (Kilgour, 1990:104-105). The absorption of ‘substances’ from a famous Victorian can be read in terms of cannibalism, as the body of the Victorian predecessor (that is, his or her life) is taken directly into the body of the contemporary work. Henry James likens the biographer to ‘the post-mortem exploiter’ (*Letters 4*, Appendix, 806). Similarly, the *Public Advertiser* writes of Boswell, biographer of Samuel Johnson, that he ‘may be *literally* said to *live* upon his deceased friend’ (1791:2, emphasis original). But it was Rudyard Kipling who explicitly compares biography to ‘a higher form of cannibalism’ (qtd. in Rollyson, 2005:94), an observation which could be applied to fiction centring on the lives of historical

people. This kind of fiction, which Cora Kaplan (2007) terms ‘biofiction’ (65), matches with the frequent use of Victorian figures as subjects of biographies, the genre which Thomas Carlyle (1833-34) believes to be ‘by nature the most universally profitable, universally pleasant of all things: especially biography of distinguished individuals’ (67). According to Isobel Armstrong (1993), ‘biographers have dominated in literary scholarship of the Victorian period’ (2). Hadley writes that ‘Of the winning biographies of the past decade of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, four have had Victorian subjects: George Eliot, Charles Darwin, John Clare, and a joint biography of Ellen Terry and Irving’ (31). There is a correspondence between the fascination with and appropriation of Victorian figures in fiction and non-fiction. This interest in Victorian lives is also evident in the use of the figure of the biographer in neo-Victorian fiction itself, as is the case in A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* (1990) and *The Biographer’s Tale* (2001) and James Wilson’s *The Dark Clue* (2001), which feature biographers and investigate the relationship between a biographer and subject.

Neo-Victorian writers’ incorporation of historical figures is an important aspect of the genre. It demonstrates both a desire to seek communion with the past and a need to express a new identity. There is a commercial element in this process as well; it is not unreasonable to assume that writers seek to benefit from the perceived popularity, as well as social or creative fecundity, of the historical personae in question. If neo-Victorian writers want to pay tribute to their literary ancestors, this honour is rarely straightforward or hagiographical; the historical personae are often presented in critical, even malicious, terms. Contemporary writers often fictionalise aspects of the Victorians’ lives that are sensational and unsavoury, as they tend to be the most compelling. According to Edmund Wilson (1952), ‘There is something more to our interest in the private lives of great men than the mere desire to pry into other people’s personal affairs’ (vii). Kaplan (2007) also contends, ‘The temptation to let the disordered life dominate literary biography’ has ‘a long and surprisingly distinguished legacy’ (48). In particular, she points out the construction of ‘male literary subjectivity’ in biographies; there seems to be an undeniable desire on the biographers’ and readers’ part to savour the more private and scandalous components of historical figures’ lives. Neo-Victorian fiction, too, although it offers novels which promote the subjectivity of Victorian women, demonstrates a stronger curiosity in ‘male

literary subjectivity', as indicated by works featuring Lewis Carroll, Charles Darwin, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Alfred Tennyson and Oscar Wilde.¹

When the interest in historical figures is translated into fiction, the novelists can take greater liberty with their subjects than biographers. In William J. Palmer's *The Detective and Mr Dickens* (1990), which is a fictional memoir narrated from the perspective of Wilkie Collins, the memoir's editor (predictably named William J. Palmer) remarks that the manuscript 'revises the accepted view of Dickens' which was perpetuated by 'overprotective biographers' (vii). Palmer exploits the assumption that biographers of Dickens are generally 'overprotective' of their subject. He encourages readers to wonder at the causes of this protectiveness and offers some 'insider's perspective' into Dickens's life through the fictionalised Collins. By relying on the perceived inadequacies of Dickens's biographies and using a veneer of memoir to further its argument, Palmer's fiction proves parasitic of non-fiction. Sometimes, the incorporation of historical figures may even cause ethical and moral issues. Beyond simply focusing on the salacious elements of a Victorian person's biography, neo-Victorian writers exaggerate them for sensational effect. For example, in Melanie Benjamin's *Alice I Have Been* (2009), a fictional account of the life of Alice Liddell Hargreaves (the inspiration for the Alice character in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* stories), John Ruskin is depicted as paedophile-like. He has a penchant for young girls and particularly preys on Alice. Benjamin admits taking the greatest liberty in the portrayal of Ruskin: 'I deliberately made him a more important figure in Alice's life than he probably was' (351). Such inaccuracy and exploitation of a historical subject is not normally accepted in biographies but is tolerated in fiction.

¹ Charles Darwin is the subject of Roger McDonald's *Mr Darwin's Shooter* (1998), John Darnton's *The Darwin Conspiracy* (2005), Sean Hoade's *Darwin's Dreams* (2010) and appears in Lynne Truss's *Tennyson's Gift* (1996) and Liz Jesen's *Ark Baby* (1997); Lewis Carroll is revisited in Katie Roiphe's *Still She Haunts Me* (2001) and Benjamin Melanie's *Alice I Have Been* (2009); Arthur Conan Doyle turns detective in Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George* (2005); Thomas Hardy is reincarnated in Howard Jacobson's *Peeping Tom* (1984) and Emma Tennant's *Tess* (1993); Henry James appears in Tennant's *Felony: The Private History of The Aspern Papers* (2002), David Lodge's *Author, Author* (2004) and Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004); Alfred Tennyson appears in Lynne Truss's *Tennyson's Gift* and Adam Foulds's *The Quickening Maze* (2009) and Oscar Wilde is the narrator of Peter Ackroyd's *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983). The neo-Victorian focus on nineteenth-century men reflects a certain level of conservatism, perhaps a symptom of the limitation of the neo-Victorian genre – it has not fully utilised the opportunity to explore nineteenth-century social patterns and norms but is to a large extent working within the tradition.

Indeed, using historical personae provocatively and suggestively in neo-Victorian fiction is fairly common. For example, Christian Gutleben (2001) considers Margaret Forster's 'parasitical' novel *Lady's Maid* (1990), which represents a 'controversial version' of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life told by partially counterfeiting Barrett Browning's voice, 'intellectually questionable' (27-29). Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010) note that the portrayal of J.W.M. Turner as insane in James Wilson's *The Dark Clue* (2001) is 'ethically questionable' (21) and may suggest that 'all lives are textually fair game' (22). Neo-Victorian novelists' motivation may be more complicated than the biographers' in their treatment of historical subjects, especially when the biofiction is about nineteenth-century authors. In such situations, the negative portrayal and debunking of their literary predecessors takes on oedipal connotations and may be seen as an attempt to destroy or triumph over literary influence. This aggression towards the Victorian subjects speaks to the cannibalistic nature of the genre, as well as the desire of the neo-Victorian writer to assert an individual identity.

II. The neo-Victorian appeal of Dickens

Of the Victorian literati, Charles Dickens, who occupies a 'central role in the canon' (Thieme, 2001:102), is an obvious choice for neo-Victorian writers to revisit. According to Georges Letissier (2004), 'From many regards, Dickens is the emblematic figure of Victorian fiction, if not of the Victorian era' (113). Simon Joyce (2007) similarly believes Dickens 'perhaps stood in the twentieth century as the most representative cultural emblem of the nineteenth century' (141). Today Dickens's name carries a distinctive sense of Victorianity and 'Dickensian' has become the stock expression to refer to a particular kind of sentiment, play and time, and writing style.

Considering his visibility,² it is not surprising that Dickens's presence is felt, explicitly or implicitly, throughout the entire neo-Victorian genre. One can find traces of his novels and influence in many neo-Victorian works. Cora Kaplan (2011) believes that 'without his celebrity, one suspects that a good percentage of the cultural capital that keeps this ever-expanding enterprise afloat would rapidly depreciate' (81). Kaplan also uses the term 'neo-Dickensian' (82) to describe contemporary works that borrow motifs from 'the Inimitable', echoing Simon Joyce (2007)'s earlier use of 'Neo-Dickensian' to refer to novels which '[return] to Dickens as a

² According to Jay Clayton (2003), Dickens has one of the largest Web presences of any literary figure' (4).

stylistic model' (142). Letissier's essay 'Dickens and Post-Victorian Fiction' (2004) also associate neo-Victorian novels with the author, discussing 'the way in which some Post-Victorian fictions read Dickens' novels from the vantage point of the late 20th and early 21st centuries' (111). Novels that capture Letissier's attention in this regard include Peter Ackroyd's *The Great Fire of London* (1982) and *English Music* (1992), Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* (1989) and Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997). Palliser's *The Quincunx* is particularly omnivorous in its incorporation of Dickens's works; it even inspired Michael Malone's (1990) remark in *The New York Times*: 'Mr. Palliser appears to have set out not merely to write a Dickens novel but to write *all* Dickens novels' (emphasis original).³ In a less direct manner, the Fenland setting in Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) evokes *Great Expectations* (Gilmour, 2000:193). Beyond using or quoting Dickens's works and style, neo-Victorian writers have used the man himself in their works, such as William J. Palmer's *The Detective and Mr Dickens* (1990) and *The Highwayman and Mr Dickens* (1992), Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), Patricia K. Davis's *A Midnight Carol: A Novel of How Charles Dickens Saved Christmas* (1999), Jeff Rackham's *The Rag & Bone Shop* (2002), Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008), Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008), Dan Simmons's *Drood* (2009), Matthew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* (2009) and Simon Gray's play *Little Nell* (2009).

Apart from his canonical status and the quality of his fiction (two factors which no doubt draw writers and readers to him), there are elements of Dickens's biography that marry well with contemporary preoccupations and contribute to his appeal to writers. The neo-Victorian is characterised by an urge to treat history in a revisionist mode, evident in the feminist and postcolonial perspectives many novels bring to their recreations of the Victorian era. Dickens's own life and interests provide material for the exploration of these themes. In the rest of this section, I will discuss two broad aspects of his biography, namely his family and intimate relationships and his involvement with British imperialism, which are used in the feminist and postcolonial revisions of his life in Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* and Flanagan's *Wanting*.

³ The main protagonist in *The Quincunx*, John Huffam, 'not only bore Dickens's own middle name but was, like Dickens, born on 7th February 1812' (Onega, 1993:231). Palliser's character is thus an oblique and playful version of his literary ancestor, even if the references to Dickens's names and birthday may not be immediately evident to casual readers. In these subtle homages, Palliser is either deliberately flaunting his knowledge or intentionally appealing to readers who are 'in the know'? Finally, by writing a character who shares important biographical details with Charles Dickens, Palliser may also in a sense be creating a version of the Victorian author.

Dickens's turbulent and humble early life, first revealed to the world by John Forster in *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1878), receive little attention in neo-Victorian fiction, perhaps because the details are too well-known to provide original narratives and unexpected plotting. The disrupted domestic felicity of his adulthood, being relatively less well-documented, is a paradoxically savoury topic and invites fictional speculation.⁴ Several neo-Victorian novels have focused on his romantic relationship with the young actress Ellen Ternan, for example.⁵ The difference between Dickens's public identity as a respected novelist and saintly family man on the one hand, and his private life as a philandering husband and emotionally distant father on the other, provides useful material for fictionalisation, as it speaks to Victorian double moral standards as well as the strange ambivalence of open secrets or public privacy. The contradictory qualities of the author have also contributed to the Dickensian 'myth' and perpetuated his celebrity status. It is exactly these elements – particularly his relationships with women – that have been further sensationalised in contemporary fiction.

The events surrounding the breakup of Dickens's marriage are now more or less common knowledge. The author turned the end of his relationship with his wife, Catherine Dickens (née Hogarth), into a public event by publishing a tell-all letter in *Household Words* on 12 June 1858, later known as the 'Violated Letter', in which he cruelly attacked Catherine. He also carried out an affair with Ternan and lived with her out of wedlock for the final twelve years of his life.⁶ But the nature of the Ternan-Dickens relationship is still contested: as Flanagan writes, 'Dickens does seem to have fallen in love with her, and to have left his wife because of that love, and he and Ellen Ternan did pursue a secret life together until his death. Exactly what *together* means remained debated' ('Author's Note', 255, emphasis original). Some critics also approach the story of Dickens and Ternan cautiously. Michael Slater (1983) writes that he 'hope[s] that

⁴ Contemporary interest in a Victorian literary man's married life is also seen in the stage adaptations of John Ruskin's marriage. According to Sharon Aronofsky Weltman in 'Victorians on Broadway at the Present Time: John Ruskin's Life on Stage', the opera *Modern Painters* (1995) and the play *The Countess* (1999) offer 'a feminist reading of Victorian culture, and blame a patriarchal Ruskin for the failure of his marriage' (79). Apart from Dickens and Ternan, other Victorian men and their relationships with women also receive attention today; these include Thomas Hardy and Tryphena Sparks and Anthony Trollope and Kate Field (Sutherland, 1988:22).

⁵ William J. Palmer's *The Detective and Mr. Dickens* (1990), Jeff Rackham's *The Rag & Bone Shop* (2002) and Dan Simmons's *Drood* (2009) all feature Ellen Ternan.

⁶ Ellen Ternan is not mentioned in the first biography of Dickens, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1878), written by John Forster. Beginning with Edgar Johnson's *Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (1953), subsequent biographies have tended to include her.

students of Dickens's life may [...] be a little less ready to accept as evidence of any real value the highly questionable reconstruction, based on the later fiction, of Dickens's relations with Ellen' (217).⁷ John Sutherland (1990b), in a review of a Ternan biography, is also tentative about her role in Dickens's life, 'Ellen Ternan, his mistress – or perhaps not his mistress' (18).

Novelists, however, are not overly concerned with resolving the truth of the matter; indeed, the mysteriousness and half-facts of Dickens's marriage and love affair have been singularly appealing to novelists for nearly a century. As early as 1928 his relationship with Ternan received fictional treatment in C.E. Bechhofer Roberts's *This Side Idolatry*. Offended by the book, George Orwell writes in the essay 'Charles Dickens' (1946) that Roberts's novel provides 'a full-length attack on Dickens':

it was a merely personal attack, concerned for the most part with Dickens's treatment of his wife. It dealt with incidents which not one in a thousand of Dickens's readers would ever hear about, and which no more invalidates his work than the second-best bed invalidates *Hamlet*. All that the book really demonstrated was that a writer's literary personality has little or nothing to do with his private character. It is quite possible that in private life Dickens was just the kind of insensitive egoist that Mr. Bechhofer Roberts makes him appear. But in his published work there is implied a personality quite different from this, a personality which has won him far more friends than enemies. (7-8)

If Orwell considers Roberts's fictionalising of Dickens's treatment of his wife 'a merely personal attack', he would likely have found fault with many neo-Victorian novels which liberally use the 'private life' and 'private character' of nineteenth-century figures. Roberts's book shows that neo-Victorian writers are not original in exploiting the sensational elements of a celebrity's life. The difference is that now the practice has become more blatant. Dickens's relationships with women also provide a platform from which contemporary writers, motivated by political and feminist concerns, can vindicate Victorian women, especially those overshadowed by more famous men. Carol Ann Duffy's poetry collection *The World's Wife* (1999) contains a poem narrated from Mrs Darwin's perspective. Perhaps playing with Victorian women's practice of journal-keeping, the poem is presented as a brief diary entry:

⁷ In his more recent biography of Dickens, Michael Slater (2009) carefully avoids the issue of a romantic relationship between Dickens and Ternan. Writing about the time after Dickens's separation from Catherine, Slater notes that 'Dickens continued to make the best of his world in all respects. Whatever modus vivendi he has established with Nelly in particular, and with the Ternan family in general' (458).

7 April 1852

Went to the Zoo.

I said to Him –

Something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds me of
you. (20)

Duffy's poem undermines Darwin by mischievously comparing him to a primate and subversively suggests that Mrs Darwin might have provided her husband with the idea behind the theory of natural selection. The trope of offering voice to marginalised women has been extensively used by neo-Victorian writers. A.S. Byatt's novella 'The Conjugal Angel' (1992), for instance, focuses on Emily Jesse, Alfred Tennyson's sister and fiancée of Arthur Hallam, to whom Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam* (1850). Melanie Benjamin's *Alice I Have Been* (2009) recounts Alice Liddell Hargreaves's life: the historical Alice, whose existence is shadowed by her fictional counterpart, is given a fuller treatment. We follow Hargreaves from girlhood to motherhood and the book ends in 1932, two years before she died, thus expanding her fictional existence well beyond her disembodied presence in the *Alice* stories. Lastly, Janice Galloway's *Clara* (2002), a fictional biography of Clara Schumann, the wife of Robert Schumann, 'participates in a feminist interrogation of the forms of biographical narratives that challenges the "Great Man" approach to biography, which focuses on the public achievement of famous men' (Hadley, 2010:40).

In our popular understanding, Dickens overshadows the women in his life such as his wife, sisters-in-law, mistress and daughters; they are 'neither observed nor recorded' (Williamson, 2012:22). Some contemporary novels with a redemptive approach to history seek to redress the balance by resurrecting their voices. Patricia K. Davis's *A Midnight Carol* (2000) narrates the early stage of Dickens's marriage and portrays Catherine affectionately. Jeff Rackham's *The Rag & Bone Shop* has three narrators, two of which are women in Dickens's life: Ellen Ternan and Georgina Hogarth.⁸ Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* fits this feminist revisionist agenda –

⁸ Wilkie Collins is the third narrator in Jeff Rackham's *The Rag & Bone Shop*. Collins is also the narrator of William J. Palmer's *The Detective and Mr Dickens* and *The Highwayman and Mr Dickens* as well as Dan Simmons's *Drood*, all of which also use Dickens prominently. Interestingly, in contemporary revisitations of the Victorian author, very few writers, if any, have taken on the task of writing *as* Dickens. Instead, they either employ an omniscient narrator or tell the story through one of the people from his life. Perhaps this is because, as a character in Graham Greene's *Travels With My Aunt* (1999[1969]) remarks, 'to my mind it was in the Victorian age that English poetry and fiction

to engage with historically marginalised women. The book is narrated by Dorothea Gibson,⁹ a thinly disguised Catherine Dickens. For Arnold, the decision to write from Dorothea's (that is, Catherine's) perspective is a deliberately redemptive one and she makes clear: 'Above all, in Dorothea Gibson I have tried to give voice to the largely voiceless Catherine Dickens' ('Afterword').¹⁰

Another aspect of Dickens's biography and oeuvre that appeals to contemporary writers is his active engagement with the empire. In his personal life, he 'frequently exil[ed] troublesome members of his large family to make a new start in the colonies' (Moore, 2004:1) and his sons Charles, Sydney, Walter and Alfred all ended up abroad.¹¹ He also engaged in colonial projects, for example, his patronage of Urania Cottage, an enterprise which helped 'fallen women' to emigrate to Australia. In his fiction, Dickens often alludes to the empire. Edward Said in *Orientalism* (2003[1979]) asserts that 'nearly every nineteenth-century writer [...] was extraordinarily well aware of the fact of empire' (14), a postulation he reiterates in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994[1993]): 'Nearly everywhere in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British and French culture we find allusions to the facts of Empire, but perhaps nowhere with more regularity and frequency than in the British novel' (73). One of the texts Said uses to illustrate his idea is Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1979:xv-xviii). Although the empire is present in Victorian literature, it is often not explicitly signaled, presented instead in a suppressed context, as Homi Bhabha (1994) notes, 'There is a conspiracy of silence around the colonial truth' (124).

reached its highest level. If I had been able to write myself [...] I would have modelled myself on one of the minor Victorians (for the giants are inimitable)' (141).

⁹ The name 'Dorothea Gibson' is reminiscent of 'Dorothea Brooke' in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) and both women are nicknamed 'Dodo'. Perhaps more significantly, by using Eliot's Dorothea as a model for Catherine Dickens, Arnold is suggesting that Dickens is like the dry-as-dust and oppressive Casaubon.

¹⁰ Lillian Nayder's *The Other Dickens: A Life of Catherine Hogarth* (2011), which was published three years after Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress*, also centres on Mrs Dickens's subjectivity. According to Nayder, her aim is to recapture 'Catherine Dickens's voice as well as [acknowledge] her silences' (18). However, as the book title suggests, the reinscription of the wife's story depends on the husband's (hence the 'Other' Dickens) and no doubt the biography is meant to attract a readership interested in the Victorian author. (This is telling if compared to David Williams Hodder's *Mr George Eliot: A Biography of George Henry Lewes* (1983), a title explicitly designed to show that the wife is the more famous of the two.) One reviewer has argued that Nayder's biography of Catherine Dickens 'breaks new ground in Victorian Studies by making Catherine, Charles Dickens's wife, the centre of a work that reconfigures the Dickens story' (Rodensky, 2011) but Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* is in many ways its precursor.

¹¹ In his biography, John Forster describes Dickens's family in 1860: 'Charley is in the Far East, Sydney is at sea, Walter in India, Alfred in Australia, whither he is planning to send another boy to join him' (qtd. in Moore, 2004:1). In *Mister Pip* (2006), Lloyd Jones has his character Matilda write, 'Alfred and Plorn, Dickens dispatches to Australia. [...] Australia, his father decides, will sort him out and flush out his natural abilities' (212-213).

Other critics have seen in the British nineteenth-century novel much more than a failure to openly address the moral implications of empire and have interpreted the genre as complicit in the imperial project. Suvendrini Perera in *Reaches of Empire* (1991) suggests that ‘Certain fictional practices – the ordering of Empire in fiction – prepared for, or made possible a climate for receiving or accommodating Empire’ (2). Firdous Azim (1993) even claims that the novel is an ‘imperial genre’ (30).

Although in works by late nineteenth-century authors such as Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling and H. Rider Haggard, its presence in the works of earlier Victorian writers such as Dickens and the Brontës is less overt and sometimes requires a readerly and critical effort to identify it. Perhaps writers felt no need to address the topic explicitly or did not feel it fit within plots that centred on British characters living in Britain. It may also be because Victorian society was not always willing to confront its own violent involvement in the empire, as economic benefits outweighed moral considerations. Empire structurally enabled Victorian literature on several levels, most obviously the economic, given that the resources generated from the colonies provided the wealth and leisure time necessary for literary activity.

But empire may have also enabled the very narratives of Victorian literature, so much so that the plots depended on it. In *Great Expectations*, for example, Pip’s bourgeois self-fulfilment is enabled by money from Magwitch’s colonial enterprises; however, in order to enter ‘respectable’ society Pip has to metaphorically ‘kill’ his father figure now returned from Australia. The penal colony thus becomes the ‘Other’ on which Pip’s Victorian gentility is constructed. That is to say, the empire is present in *Great Expectations* but it is rendered a subtext. When this subtext is critically interrogated, we see the extent to which Victorian material and economic culture as well as imagination depended on empire. It is this kind of colonial subtext that neo-Victorian fiction attempts to tease out. In ‘Twentieth-Century Re-Workings of the Victorian Novel’, Grace Moore (2008) identifies a ‘postcolonial backlash against a continuing valorisation of the English literary canon’ (134) as one of the reasons for contemporary obsession with reinventing the nineteenth century. Imperialism, ‘suppressed’ in many Victorian novels, is ‘released’ in the neo-Victorian. Nineteenth-century texts in which the colonies are present, although often only implied or written about obliquely, such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Emily Brontë’s

Wuthering Heights (1847) and Dickens's *Great Expectations*, are popular targets for contemporary revision. Victorian novels in which imperialism is more overtly addressed, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), have also received post-colonial reworking.

Of all the colonies which Dickens wrote about or was interested in, Australia, a 'white' settler colony and the most popular destination of emigration in the 1850s, is perhaps the most visible. Australia was also where Dickens's work was best-received outside Britain and America (Thieme, 2001:103) and he himself considered emigrating there. As mentioned above, Dickens was involved with the running of Urania Cottage and uses Australia in his novels, albeit ambivalently. In *David Copperfield* (1849-50), he sends characters such as the Micawbers, Mr Peggotty and Emily to start better lives in the colony, lives which would have been impossible if they had stayed in Britain. In this sense, Australia is like 'a New World Arcadia' (Thieme, 2001:103). Dickens also portrays Australia negatively and miserably. In *Great Expectations*, Magwitch is deported to New South Wales, reflecting colony as a site of banishment and punishment in the nineteenth century.

These twin views of Australia in Dickens's novels provoked twin reactions among writers from that country. John Thieme (2001) believes that some Australian authors, such as Henry Lawson, saw Dickens as 'a father figure' (103). John O. Jordan (2003) goes so far as to suggest that Dickens is the 'single English writer' who embodies 'cultural authority and originary enunciative power' with respect to Australia (46). Perhaps because of its unflattering portrayal of the Antipodes, Dickens's *Great Expectations* has inspired much postcolonial reworking. Examples include Michael Noonan's *Magwitch* (1982), Elizabeth Jolley's *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* (1983), Tim Burstall's film of Australian nationhood *Great Expectations: The Untold Story* (1988) and Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1998). Carey's novel, written out of a sense of 'colonial insecurity' (Hanitijo, 2012:50), has especially received critical attention for its postcolonial themes. According to Simon Joyce (2007), *Jack Maggs* is a response to 'Edward Said's insistence that we rethink *Great Expectations* from an Australian perspective, seeing Victorian Britain and its colony as interdependent spaces' (166). The book also interrogates the novel's role in the imperial project: 'Carey challenges Dickens's novel's participation in Britain's ideology of overseas expansion and penal colonisation of Australia' (Sadoff, 2010:164).

Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* provides a similar investigation of Dickens's role in the empire and Australia, although he does so by appropriating the author's life, not his fiction. Like Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress*, *Wanting* fictionalises sensational elements in Dickens's biography such as his problematic marriage and relationship with Ellen Ternan. Flanagan, himself a Tasmanian who has written both fiction and non-fiction exploring the early colonial history of Australia, employs Dickens, Sir John and Lady Franklin and the Aboriginal girl Mathinna to explore issues of colonialism and exploitation. Both *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* incorporate and adapt the life of Charles and Catherine Dickens to discuss broader issues that the novelists are passionately engaged with, particularly gender and sexuality for Arnold, a female writer trying to give voice to a marginalised woman in history, and race and empire for Flanagan, an Australian keen to revisit his country's colonial history. Both novels, then, create new novelistic identities through the incorporation of a Victorian influence and they fit Kaplan's (2007) 'wider definition' of Victoriana: 'one that includes the self-conscious rewriting of historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and Empire, as well as challenges to the conventional understandings of the historical itself' (3). If neo-Victorian fiction is defined by a self-conscious return to history to explore issues pertaining to gender and empire, then it would seem that Dickens's life is especially fruitful for contemporary writers to explore. As Geordie Williamson (2012) remarks, Dickens 'helped create the structures of feeling against which subsequent generations would rebel' (22). As we will see, both Arnold and Flanagan, in addition to their revisionist incorporation of Dickens, also reveal a desire to commune with the Victorian author. Both works demonstrate the conflicting motivations of neo-Victorian cannibalism of the past: a desire for communion and for identity-formation.

III. Introducing *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) and *Wanting* (2008)

Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* were both published in 2008 to critical acclaim. *Girl in a Blue Dress* was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize and *Wanting* won the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Fiction. Juxtaposing Dickens's biography, historical facts and novelised elements, these books belong to the 'biofiction' genre discussed by Cora Kaplan (2007:62-76). Even though Arnold uses pseudonyms for Dickens and his wife, she reveals in sections of the book as well as in interviews that *Girl in a Blue Dress* is

about Dickens.¹² *Wanting*, on the other hand, focuses on Dickens's feelings and thoughts about his unhappy marriage, rather than Catherine's, as well as his attraction to Ellen Ternan. The book alternates between the story of Dickens and the story of Mathinna, an Aboriginal Tasmanian child adopted by Sir John Franklin and his wife as a kind of social experiment. The connection between the two stories is John Franklin, whose failed polar expedition sparks Dickens's passionate interest.¹³ In real life, Dickens wrote three articles for *Household Words* 'to refute the charges that Sir John Franklin's final ill-fated Arctic expedition had resorted to cannibalism' (Stone, 1994:3). Dickens also acted in the play *The Frozen Deep*, inspired by the expedition. During the production, he met the actress Ternan and developed a romantic relationship with her. Many of these biographical details are explored in *Wanting*.

Girl in a Blue Dress and *Wanting* liberally appropriate Dickens's aura and biography, in particular, his romantic history. In this incorporation, the two novels have little direct relation with the Victorian author's literary work. In *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Arnold makes up new texts and new fictional characters for Dickens's stand-in.¹⁴ Even though traces of Dickens's work may still be found in these fabrications, the practice feels like playacting, a knowing lark. One reviewer writes: 'Dickens aficionados will delight in winky references to his novels' (Cokal, 2009). In *Wanting*, Flanagan admits that he has 'on occasion made free use of sentences and phrases from Dickens's own work' ('Afterword', 256). The fact that he only uses Dickens's work freely 'on occasion' indicates that for Flanagan, too, the main concern is not to engage in a serious dialogue with the Victorian texts. Still, in terms of style the two novels can be seen as 'Dickensian'. For example, a *Telegraph* reviewer comments on *Girl in a Blue Dress* that 'Arnold cleverly (and lightly) creates an authentic Dickensian tone, with sweet touches of humour, as well as evoking other novels of the period' (Mckay, 2008). Another reviewer writes, 'Sometimes the novel is a bit too Dickensian: Gibson's parents are parodies of the Micawbers, and the midwife too Gampy by half' (Palmer, 2008).

¹² Arnold writes, 'The marriage of Charles Dickens was the inspiration for this book' ('Afterword'). She also points out that she has 'struck out in new directions where the biographical material is sparse, speculative, or open to doubt', but maintains that she has tried 'to keep true to the essential natures of the two main protagonists' (ibid.).

¹³ Dan Simmons's *The Terror* (2007), another neo-Victorian novel, also touches upon Sir John's experience in the Arctic, albeit peripherally.

¹⁴ This technique is also used by Peter Carey in *Jack Maggs* (1997). In that novel, Tobias Oates, Dickens's fictional stand-in, has written a successful novel entitled *Captain Crumley*, which is reminiscent of *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37).

Due to their stylistic affinity with nineteenth-century writing in general, and specifically, a textual pattern reminiscent of Dickens's work, novels like *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* offer readers a neo-Dickensian style. That said, it is more like a performance than straightforward reconstruction of the Victorian author's texture, akin to Freud's tribe members donning their totem's skin in the 'totem meal'. Arnold's creation of an imaginary canon for Gibson seems to suggest that Dickens's texts, too familiar to readers, have rather lost their appeal. George Orwell (1946) writes that Dickens 'happens to be one of those "great authors" who are ladled down everyone's throat in childhood. At the time this causes rebellion and vomiting' (8). Arnold's playful invention of her own Dickensian canon, too, may be seen as a kind of 'rebellion' and 'vomiting' out of the Dickens texts she has consumed. In *Wanting*, the Victorian author's sentences and phrases are doubly disembodied: first from their original source and second, from the contextual backgrounds. For example, Flanagan has Dickens say to Forster and Collins after his meeting with Lady Jane: 'I am rather strong on voyages and cannibalism'. The sentence initially appeared in a letter Dickens wrote to W.H. Wills in 1854. Taken out of the letter, it is digested into the narrative as conversation, transposed from one domain to another. While Dickens's words are found disgorged here and there, their sources are not immediately identifiable. And they need not be. *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* are concerned with using Dickens the man rather than 'writing back' to his canonical texts.¹⁵

Girl in a Blue Dress reveals the method neo-Victorian novels adopt in their cannibalisation of past texts. The construction of the title *Girl in a Blue Dress* recalls the title of Vermeer's seventeenth-century painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. (The painting is also the inspiration for

¹⁵ Texts that do 'write back' to Dickens's novels include Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* (1982), Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* and Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2006), which are responses to *Great Expectations*. The cross-generic influence of Dickens can be seen in the Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), which uses *A Tale of Two Cities* as an intertext (Wickman, 2012). There is a constellation of novels that take inspiration from the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), such as Leon Garfield's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1980), Charles Forsyte's *The Decoding of Edwin Drood* (1980), Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini's *The D Case* (1995), Jean-Pierre Ohl's *Mr Dick or The Tenth Book* (2008), Dan Simmons's *Drood* (2009) and Matthew Pearl's *The Last Dickens* (2009). In the article 'Unending Dickens: Droodian Absences' (2011), Joachim Frenk discusses how *Drood* and *The Last Dickens* 'address contemporary debates and concerns in their striving to offer acceptable and/or marketable endings' (133). In *Mr Dick or The Tenth Book*, a character's description of his relationship with Dickens echoes neo-Victorian novelists' reaction to their literary predecessors in general: 'I had always known, that the only way to get anywhere was to write my own book, and close the circle. To make use of *him*, and at the same time root him out of myself as one might remove an organ, drown him in the formaldehyde of a book. Force him out of my body, like a virus. But how? My whole being was infected' (144, emphasis original). This passage encapsulates the sense of helpless ambivalence one suffers when possessed by a literary influence – Dickens is compared to both an organ and a virus. It also betrays the character's cannibalism of Dickens – the Victorian author is *inside* his body.

Tracy Chevalier's 1999 historical novel, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, since adapted into a film and a play.) The title of Arnold's book, then, may instantaneously evoke a sense of 'borrowedness', fitting for a book that freely borrows material from various textual, cultural and historical sources from different periods, especially those from the nineteenth century and those related to Dickens. The fact that references such as *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and others (see, for instance, a Shakespearean reference in fn. 38) that are not specifically Victorian are used in the book suggests Arnold's omnivorous cannibalism of substances (but by no means 'random', as Jameson's criticism of postmodernism would have it). It also highlights the book's indifferent incorporation of Dickens's texts. Although this kind of mix-and-match of materials may suggest a certain level of inauthenticity in contemporary texts, this inauthenticity should be considered a symptom of the liminality of the genre instead of a flaw. In truth, the novels are neither genuine Victorian texts nor straightforward contemporary fiction but are a new literary species.

Girl in a Blue Dress and *Wanting* share a number of similarities, such as their use of historical people and their indifferent treatment of Dickens's texts. But they are also very different from each other in terms of scope and point of narration. A reviewer of *Girl in a Blue Dress* describes the relationship between the two books: '*Girl in a Blue Dress* is the second book about the Victorian author's tortured private life that I've come across in a month. The first, from the aggrieved husband's point of view, was Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*, and now Gaynor Arnold's very different novel sounds like the wife's rebuttal' (Charles, 2009). The reviewer envisions the two novels engaged in a spousal dialogue: the husband's miserable account of his marriage in *Wanting* is countered by the wife's in *Girl in a Blue Dress*. Together the two books offer a picture of what might have transpired between the couple, although their marriage is not the only focus of the novels. Not only do *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* use Dickens differently, they also engage him to different extents. *Girl in a Blue Dress*, an attempt to 'give voice to the largely voiceless Catherine Dickens', is very much Dickens's story told from the wife's mirroring perspective. In the book, it is as if Catherine's existence begins with her first encounter with Dickens. Even after his death, his spectre looms large in the background. *Girl in a Blue Dress* opens with the author's funeral – perhaps a knowing nod towards Roland Barthes's 'the death of the author'.¹⁶ Yet, Dickens's presence is made more pronounced with his spectral absence, and

¹⁶ David Lodge's 2004 *Author, Author* similarly begins with an image of the dying Henry James.

he also appears, alive, in Catherine's frequent reminiscences. *Wanting*, however, focuses on Dickens in half of the book only; the other half is devoted to the history of Tasmania and the story of Mathinna. The immersion of Dickens is more 'total' in *Girl in a Blue Dress* than *Wanting*. Regardless, both books elucidate the characteristics of the type of neo-Victorian novels that incorporate, revise and revisit nineteenth-century celebrities as a means of discussing broader ideological issues.

Despite these differences, one remarkable similarity shared by *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* is their use of the theme of cannibalism. Arnold and Flanagan may have been inspired to use this motif from Dickens himself. Harry Stone (1994) argues convincingly and elaborately in *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity* that cannibalism was Dickens's 'lifelong obsession' (267). His attraction to the subject may have been the result of a combination of factors, including his childhood absorption of cannibal tales told by his nurse and his knowledge of material featuring cannibalism such as '[g]rotesque picture books, frightening songster graphics, gruesome illustrations, horrific prints, nightmare cartoons, macabre squibs, savage caricatures' (25). His introduction to the topic at a formative age seems to have developed into an obsession in later life. As mentioned previously, Dickens campaigned to prove that Sir Franklin and his group had not engaged in cannibalism during their expedition in the Arctic. Stone also discusses how cannibalism is often directly or covertly alluded to in much of Dickens's journalism and fiction.¹⁷

That both Arnold and Flanagan use cannibalism as a theme, then, is understandable, given its prominence in Dickens's life and work. Their choice of topic may also indicate their knowledge of his obsession. Additionally, the two writers use the theme in their revisionist critique of the misogynist, oppressive and racist undercurrent of Victorian ideology. In the following sections, I will read the ways the theme of cannibalism is incorporated in *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* to bring out feminist and postcolonial concerns. I will first discuss *Girl in a Blue Dress*, in which Dickens is portrayed as both a cannibal and a cannibalised subject, and consider the

¹⁷ For example, the cannibal-like Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), the cannibalistic mobs in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), the all-consuming Chancery law suit in *Bleak House* (1852-53), Magwitch's threat to eat Pip's cheeks in *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and the corpse-fishing business described in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65).

function of this dual representation, especially in relation to the book's revisionist agenda and the relationship between the contemporary writer and the Victorian celebrity. I will then discuss *Wanting*, in which both literal and metaphorical cannibalism are evoked and, in particular, the theme appropriated to make explicit the cannibalistic nature of colonialism. I also argue that Arnold's and Flanagan's use of cannibalism is a self-reflexive comment, whether conscious or not, on their own use of Dickens, as well as a reflection of the cannibalistic method of the neo-Victorian as a whole.

IV. *Girl in a Blue Dress*: Dickens the cannibal cannibalised

*i. Dickens: The cannibal*¹⁸

True to the Dickensian tradition, eating scenes abound in Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress*.¹⁹ Characters are constantly having tea, dinner or supper. Alfred Gibson (Dickens's stand-in) is also connected with food: 'Food always cheered him up' (73). Amidst the scenes in which normal food and drinks are consumed, there are also references to people as food – Alfred tends to see young members of the opposite sex as edible.²⁰ One such example is his description of Flora, a pie-shop cook:²¹ 'And Flora the pie-shop cook, *who bakes the very best meat pies in the world and who goes about it with such neatness and with such a smile that some of the deliciousness of her person must surely get into the pies*' (45, emphasis original).²² But it is his wife, Dorothea

¹⁸ In Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*, which returns to both *Great Expectations* and 'the life of Dickens or the life of Dickens as a (biographical) text' (Mukherjee, 2005:117), Tobias Oates (Dickens's stand-in in the novel) is also portrayed as a cannibal figure. In the book, the Victorian author undertakes a type of metaphorical cannibalism by using the stories of his social inferiors to advance his writing career. In particular, he treats Jack Maggs (Magwich from *Great Expectations*) cannibalistically, as shown in scenes when he mesmerises the ex-convict. Jack Maggs describes the process: 'Whatever it is called, it is a terrible thing, Sir, for a man to feel his insides all exposed to public view' (46). In another scene, Oates 'memorised the hard shine to Jack Maggs's skin as it cleaved closed to the bones of his cheek and jaw. He would use those bones, perhaps tomorrow. On the following day he would return for those deeper, more painful items which must still be cut free from the softer tissue of Jack Maggs's memory' (178).

¹⁹ See Ian Watt's 'Oral Dickens' (1974), in which 'the richness and variety of his [Dickens's] treatment of food and drink' (165) is discussed.

²⁰ This echoes Dickens's own portrayal of females in his fiction. According to Stone (1994), 'Dickens seems to have had a penchant for edible young females' (224).

²¹ The pie-shop setting is probably a reference to the penny dreadful *The String of Pearls* (1846-47), in which the character Mrs Lovett bakes human flesh into pies.

²² Unless otherwise noted, all emphases in the quotations from *Girl in a Blue Dress* appear originally in the book.

Gibson (i.e. Catherine Dickens), who is often the recipient of Alfred's hungry attention.²³ As James E. Marlow points out in 'English Cannibalism: Dickens after 1859' (1983), 'the very closest of human relationships, marriage, was converted into one, literally, of eater and eaten' (648). In the marriage of Alfred and Dodo (Dorothea's nickname in the novel), he is the eater and she the eaten.²⁴ When he is courting Dodo, Alfred writes to her, saying, '*Dodo, I need to see you, hear you, feel you, smell you, taste you. In fact, I want to gobble you up in your entirety, like the Big Bad Wolf, no matter what entreaties you make, however much you flail your little white arms in the air*' (56). Here, Arnold has Alfred compare himself to the wolf in the well-known fairytale. He is like an animal that is guided entirely by five senses and Dodo is the helpless Red Riding Hood, soon to be devoured by the cruel animal of the forest.²⁵ Yet, if Alfred is a wolf, he is in some sense not a cannibal; he is a wild animal eating a person. The cannibalism here is thus masked. Although Alfred is associated with a wolf, he is actually a man, so the scene takes on the aspect of a kind of cannibalism presented in terms of predator and prey relationship. The description is also the reverse of the original fairytale, in which the wolf eats the grandmother, then dresses up as her to eat the child – a form of non-cannibalism disguised as cannibalism.

Once the two are married, Alfred's cannibalistic desire is portrayed even more overtly. Arnold has him say, 'So what have *we* got for supper then, Dodo? Why don't we broil some cutlets and eat them in front of the fire, licking the bones as if we were naked savages on the shores of Lake Titicaca!' (73) (Here, Dickens's stand-in is capable of making jokes about savages. In the discussion of *Wanting* below, we will see how Dickens takes the idea of 'savages' far more seriously.) Elsewhere, Alfred continues to see his wife in terms of food, as the following remarks indicate: '*Come, Dodo, don't be all trussed up like a Christmas turkey*' (35) and '*What a*

²³ The name Dorothea recalls David's childish wife, Dora, in Dickens's most autobiographical novel *David Copperfield* (1849-50). Arnold's choice of 'Dorothea' for Dickens's wife can thus be viewed as a knowing reference to the Victorian author's work, in which Dora, who fails to bring happiness to her husband, is punished by death. Significantly, when the couple are quarrelling in *David Copperfield*, Dora calls David 'Blue Beard' (qtd. in Stone, 1994:121), which Dodo also uses to refer to Alfred in *Girl in a Blue Dress*.

²⁴ The dodo bird is famous for having been fearless of people, and as a result, the species was hunted to extinction relatively soon after being discovered by European settlers. As the quintessential easy prey, the choice of this nickname for Dickens's wife must be considered deliberate.

²⁵ Arnold's comparison of Alfred to the Big Bad Wolf echoes the description of Mr. Brocklehurst in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847): 'What a face he had.... What a great nose! And what a mouth! And what large prominent teeth!' (30) Discussing this particular passage, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000[1979]) note, 'Jane Eyre exclaims, recollecting that terror of the adult male animal which must have wrung the heart of every female child in a period when all men were defined as "beasts"' (233).

delicious little nose!’ (252) Unsurprisingly, he also finds the sight of Dodo preparing food exciting. At one point, she says that her husband ‘liked to see me with my apron on, [...] poring over recipes with smudges of flour on my cheek’ (90).

Some of the cannibalistic scenes in *Girl in a Blue Dress* are closely associated with intercourse, a connection which corresponds to theories about cannibalism. According to Maggie Kilgour (1990), eating and sex are similar, as both make ‘two bodies one’ (7). One scene, which juxtaposes supper and sex, makes the link between food and consummation obvious. Dodo recalls an evening when Alfred ‘lifted me off my feet and whirled me into the bedroom and threw me down on the bed’ (91). The woman protests: “‘Alfred! The supper will be even more ruined than it is now.” “Hang the supper!” he said, taking off his jacket and unbuttoning his waistcoat. “I have a tastier morsel here!”’ (92) In this exchange, Alfred not only views his wife as food, but the way in which he acts on his desire transforms him into the ‘Big Bad Wolf’ he likens himself to. He is the animalistic aggressor, physically strong – he ‘pulled me down upon the bed’ and ‘threw me down on the bed’ – and Dodo is the victim of his gluttonous advances. Although the wife welcomes Alfred’s attention, it cannot be denied that through portraying him as a cannibalistic and lustful assailant, Arnold is vandalising the Victorian author. We are made acutely aware of the difference between his respectful public persona and bestial private behaviour.

Arnold also compares Dickens to another fairy tale villain, the serial wife-killing cannibal Bluebeard.²⁶ Moments before consummating her relationship with Alfred, Dodo reflects that ‘Alfred could never hurt me, I told myself. Yet I could not altogether put from my mind the disconcerting stories of erstwhile model suitors who on the instant of bedding their brides had

²⁶ The comparison of Alfred to Bluebeard, again, echoes *Jane Eyre*. In Chapter 11 of Brontë’s novel, the third floor of Thornfield Hall is described with ‘two rows of small black doors, all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard’s castle’ (111). In her *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and Its Progeny* (2011), Heta Pyrhönen even reads *Jane Eyre* and its subsequent adaptations, some of which are neo-Victorian novels, as ‘Bluebeard’ tales. Of relevance to this thesis is the use of fairy tales in neo-Victorian works to articulate oppressed female subjectivity, as indicated by the use of ‘Red Riding Hood’ and ‘Bluebeard’ in *Girl in a Blue Dress*. Angela Carter’s story ‘The Bloody Chamber’, which recreates late nineteenth-century France, is also a retelling of the Bluebeard story. Commenting on it, Helen Simpson (2006) highlights an homage to an earlier cannibal figure: ‘The story is set in a castle on sea-grit Mont St Michel in *fin-de-siècle* France, with more than a nod to Sade’s cannibal Minski and his lake-surrounded castle with its torture chamber and captive virgins’ (xii-xiii). More recently, A.S. Byatt’s *The Children’s Book* (2009) also features a Bluebeard-like figure, the potter Benedict Fludd (Llewelyn, 2010:142).

become transformed into veritable Blue-beards' (221). The comparison between Alfred and Bluebeard should alert the reader the sense of threat and horror the man provokes in his wife. After the death of Dodo's sister, Alice (i.e. Mary Hogarth),²⁷ who had been staying with the newlyweds, the mother-in-law grows to dislike Alfred: 'she took every opportunity to imply that he was some kind of Bluebeard' (277). By comparing Alfred to the serial killer, Dodo's mother shows that she holds him responsible for Alice's death; more damningly, she suggests that her daughter was some kind of 'wife' to Alfred (instead of sister-in-law). This hints at incestuous transgression and the extent of the author's monstrosity;²⁸ as he does not even spare his wife's sister, he is perhaps worse than the cold-blooded murderer in the fairy tale. The mother's apprehension is not entirely unfounded, as Dodo is aware of her husband's attraction to her sister: 'If I had been 'sweet' as Alice was instead of 'weak' as I appeared to him, perhaps Alfred would have indeed loved me better' (310).²⁹

The Bluebeard fairytale is about a wife-eating ogre (Warner, 1994:259), and Dickens's own comment on a particular 'Captain Murderer' in 'Nurse Stories' (1860) makes the connection between a particular kind of nuptial relationship and cannibalism explicit:

The first diabolical character who intruded himself on my peaceful youth [...] was a certain Captain Murderer. This wretch must have been an off-shoot of the Blue Beard family, but I had no suspicion of the consanguinity in those times. His warning name would seem to have awakened no general prejudice against him, for he was admitted into the best society and possessed immense wealth. Captain Murderer's mission was matrimony, and the gratification of a cannibal appetite with tender brides (222).

It almost seems that Dickens's description of Captain Murderer provided the basis for Arnold's portrayal of Alfred in *Girl in A Blue Dress*.³⁰

Later, after several pregnancies, Dodo grows fat and falls out of Alfred's favour: 'I sensed that Alfred's feelings towards me were less intense than they once had been, [...], I felt that

²⁷ The name 'Alice' reminds one of the young heroine in Carroll's *Alice* stories.

²⁸ In *Jack Maggs* (1997), Peter Carey touches upon the incestuous relationship between Tobias Oates (the Dickens character) and his sister-in-law, a relationship that results in a pregnancy.

²⁹ This description of 'sweetness' coalesces with John Forster's evaluation of Mary Hogarth: 'by sweetness of nature even more than grace of person she had made herself the ideal of his [Dickens's] life' (qtd. in Bowen, 1956:79).

³⁰ In her discussion of Dickens in association with the story of Captain Murderer, Hilary M. Schor (1999) believes that in Dickens's novels one sees 'a similar machinery for the entrapment and consumption of gullible girls' (1).

motherhood was the cause of it' (133).³¹ Alfred turns to other appetising targets and shuts Dodo out of the family. Dodo knows that 'he'd got tired of his old wife and wanted somebody younger, fresh, more to his taste' (280). Her other younger sister, Sissy (i.e. Georgina Hogarth), who lives with the couple and helps take care of the growing family, soon replaces Dodo as the mistress of the house. Alfred's grown-up son describes Sissy as 'our wicked stepmother' (325). When Dodo objects to the word 'wicked', the son retorts, 'Oh, *wonderful* stepmother, then. Miss Honey Bun with Sugar Sauce, yum-yum!' (326) In addition to the direct comparison of human and dissent, the reference to 'stepmother' is interesting; it again suggests that Alfred takes Dodo's sister as 'wife' (hence she becomes stepmother to Dodo's children). The 'wife' idea is corroborated by Sissy, who says to Dodo after Alfred's death, 'I feel exactly like a widow' (239). It is suggestive and almost perverse that a woman regards herself as 'widow' after the death of a brother-in-law. No wonder Dodo angrily pronounces, 'You usurped me, Sissy!' (232)³²

Another woman Alfred takes to is the actress Wilhelmina Rickets (i.e. Ellen Ternan), whom he refers to as 'his little bird' (387), as if his prey. At one point in the novel, Dodo and Wilhelmina meet. Dodo says to her, 'It's new love that makes the old one grow old. That is why he no longer wanted *me*. Not slow, fat old Dodo, when he could have sweet young flesh instead-' (376). Dodo, who knows her husband's appetites, adds, 'What did you give him that was so precious, if not your own body?' (ibid.) Dodo sees in the young actress the ingredients that would make her an appetising dish for Alfred: 'sweet' and 'young', emphasising that it is her 'flesh' and 'body' that he desires. Note that Arnold presents both women as birds – Wilhelmina as a little bird and his wife as a fat old dodo. The unappetising nature of Dodo is underlined by the fact that many

³¹ Marina Warner (1994) points out the connection between pregnancy and cannibalism: '[T]he threat of being eaten stands for the dread of being immured, confined. (It is interesting that the word 'confinement' is used for the late stages of pregnancy.)' (260)

³² Other writers also present Georgina Hogarth as a kind of wife to Dickens. Jeff Rackham uses a similar idea in *The Rag & Bone Shop*. In that book, Georgina is portrayed as a deluded woman, who imagines herself in love with Dickens, 'No one knew how devoted I was to him – or he to me. Our love was silent, unspoken, but no less tangible' (152). Later, she takes her obsession a step further and begins referring to Dickens as 'my husband' (272, 277, 279). This characterisation of the relationship between Dickens and Georgina may even be evident in Dickens's own work. George Orwell (1946) says that in *David Copperfield*, 'even Dora is killed off to make way for Agnes. If you like, you can read Dora as Dickens's wife and Agnes as his sister-in-law' (54). Michael Slater in *Dickens and Women* (1983) also suggests that Dora was a stand-in for Catherine Dickens: 'Was he, perhaps, teasingly reminding Catherine of this situation years later when he makes Dora reproach her 'Doady' (David Copperfield) who is working phenomenally long hours in order to make himself sufficiently solvent to marry her?' (104) The fact that Mrs Dickens is Dorothea in *Girl in a Blue Dress* seems to invite a similar reading: that Dodo is Dora and will be replaced by Sissy (Agnes).

settlers found dodo's meat tough and unsavoury. The portrayal of Alfred as a sexual cannibal is perhaps most explicitly presented at another point in the conversation between the two women. Dodo comments that the actress is 'very much in the mould – his own particular mould, I mean. The mould I never fitted once I became a wife' (386). Both women are like dough, kneaded into suitable shapes by the same chef, although in the end only one of them fits his ideal form.³³

By portraying Alfred as a cannibalistic ogre and transforming the women in his life, including his wife, his sister-in-law and mistress into objects to be devoured, what does Arnold want to achieve? One scene in the book reveals part of the answer. After being told by Alfred that he wants to terminate their marriage, Dodo behaves erratically, even in public: 'I made a public spectacle of myself, too. I made remarks at the supper-table; *I indicated that I was a Wronged Woman and he a Beast*' (253). This encapsulates some of the intention of the book: to paint the Victorian author as a 'Beast' and his docile wife as a 'Wronged Woman'. In fact, all three women are 'wronged' by the 'Beast'. While we know Dodo's story, through her conversation with her sister Sissy (Chapter 17) and the actress Wilhelmina (Chapters 25-26), we see that they are also victims. Dodo realises Sissy 'will end a lonely spinster' (244) and Wilhelmina predicts that by agreeing to live with the author, she will 'step outside the respectable world for ever, and lose my reputation, my profession and my chance of marriage' (388). Alfred deprives both Sissy and Wilhelmina of the chance to get married. Given the centrality of wedlock in Victorian times, Alfred is committing a great crime: if he has not murdered his 'wives' like Bluebeard, he has 'murdered' their chances of living within reputable society.³⁴

Simon Callow (2009), in a review of Michael Slater's recent biography of Dickens, also notes the cruelty the real-life actress suffered at the hands of the author: 'he swept up the young actress Ellen Ternan and, because of the necessary secrecy of their life together, made her in effect a prisoner of love, robbing her of her youth and her autonomy'. Arnold sees the relationship in a similar way. In an interview, she says that she was 'interested in the plight of women at that

³³ Alfred's moulding of the young Wilhelmina is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's treatment of his child heroine. According to Lisa Coar (2012), 'Carroll wants to experiment with Alice's body, mould her into what he pleases' (57).

³⁴ Georgina Hogarth died unmarried and, although Ellen Ternan later married George Wharton Robinson, she and her sisters kept her relationship with Dickens a secret. See Claire Tomalin's *The Invisible Woman: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens* (1990).

time – how “immobile” they were in their social and domestic role (and physically too)’ (2008). She presents this immobility in *Girl in a Blue Dress* by portraying the female characters as trapped victims of Alfred’s cannibalistic desires. They are all in effect emotionally stifled and physically imprisoned in their relationship with the Victorian author, particularly Dodo, due to her multiple pregnancies. Even the daughter, Kitty, is ‘immobile’, as Alfred frustrates her aspiration to act: ‘he stopped me doing everything I wanted to. I could have been an actress. But he said the theatre wasn’t a life for a lady’ (29). Under these circumstances, it is understandable that she describes her father as ‘a cruel, *cruel* man. Cruel to his wife, and cruel to his children’ (5).³⁵

ii. Dickens: *The cannibalised*

While Alfred is portrayed as a sexual cannibal in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, he also sees *himself* as an object of consumption. At one point he says, ‘*If I am wrong, I will drown myself in the Thames and feed fishes for ever and a day*’ (42) and later, ‘the mildest of women can make mincemeat of me’ (247). Admittedly, these remarks show Alfred in his comic mode and remind us of Dickens’s own humorous take on the subject of cannibalism, as Harry Stone discusses in *The Night Side of Dickens* (1994). But there are other more sinister food references in *Girl in a Blue Dress*. Kristen Guest (2001) contends, ‘Among mainstream middle-class Victorian writers, none exemplified the two-fold fear of being consumed and the fear of consuming another like Charles Dickens’ (11). Guest also points out that cannibal metaphors in Dickens’s works express ‘a world in which human beings are envisioned as objects of consumption’, a world resulting from ‘the rapid rise of ‘consumer’ culture at the time’ (ibid.).³⁶ Indeed, in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, the primary eater of Alfred is the public, his ‘consumers’. He says to Wilhelmina: ‘*The Public asks too much! It’s killing me!*’ He used to hold up his inky fingers and joke: *Look at my life blood ebbing away!*’ (394) Despite Alfred’s humorous tone, he expresses a real anxiety.

³⁵ This echoes what Kate Perugini (née Dickens) says of her father: ‘My father was a wicked man – a very wicked man’ (qtd. in Schor, 1999:1).

³⁶ See Krista Lysack’s *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women’s Writing* (2008) for a discussion of nineteenth-century consumer culture, focusing particularly on the woman shopper.

Alfred is portrayed like food most pabably in scenes in which he gives public readings.³⁷ On these occasions, ‘The halls would be filled to capacity, people packed as close as it was possible to be, the temperature near to boiling’ (282). The image of the crowd here not only reminds one of Dickens’s representations of mobs in his novels, but also corresponds to the kind of crowds he attracted. According to Edward D. Johnson, ‘It has been estimated that during his lifetime Dickens addressed an audience of a million and a half, or approximately one out of ten readers in Great Britain’ (qtd. in Barndollar and Schorn, 2002:160). This number has prompted Barnadollar and Schorn to remark that ‘Communion with a million and a half souls is quite an achievement’ (160). What Arnold describes in *Girl in a Blue Dress* is tainted with cynicism, however. With the halls ‘boiling’, as if giant cooking pots, the scene is reminiscent of an almost obscene public cannibalistic feast. The starving and savage public eagerly await their prey with an insatiable appetite, ‘New audiences clamouring for his every word and gesture, new critics ready for the kill’ (282). The hungry crowd, a monster with thousands of heads, then feeds upon the author until ‘he was little more than a *skelington in a suit* at the end, and had to be laid out flat with a dark bandage over his eyes as soon as he came off stage’ (329). We see the transformation of Alfred’s human flesh into public entertainment for consumption. The scene is also highly suggestive of Freud’s totem meal, with the audience acting as the clan members and Dickens as totem. While we do not see the public dress up as their totem, we do see them come *en masse* to metaphorically consume Dickens’s words, which echoes the symbolic consumption of the totem. In the public’s reaction to the Victorian author we see the beginnings of a very modern version of the totem meal – the public consumption of celebrity. The ‘skelington’ is a recurrent image in *Girl in a Blue Dress*. Elsewhere, Alfred says, ‘The One and Only is a slave to his Readers. They suck me dry. When I die, I shall be found a mere *skelington*, a bag of bones, sans *hair*, sans *teeth*, sans *eyes*, sans *everything*’ (138).³⁸ Here, the consumers are explicitly compared to a vampire (‘They suck me dry’) and Alfred its tragic and defenceless victim who sacrifices everything save

³⁷ For more about Dickens and his public readings, see Malcolm Andrews’s *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves* (2006).

³⁸ ‘Sans *hair*, sans *teeth*, sans *eyes*, sans *everything*’ is a reference to Shakespeare’s ‘Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything’, from *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene VII, Line 166). Arnold is echoing a hallmark of Victorian writing, which often appropriated Shakespearean quotations and allusions. As Gail Marshall (2005) argues, Shakespeare ‘has his most significant incarnation in the Victorian period in the works of those other writers whom he has influenced’ (1). Dickens himself, like many other writers of the period, also frequently alluded to the bard. In *The Everyman History of English Literature* (1985), Peter Conrad talks about Dickens’s incorporation of Shakespeare in *Oliver Twist* (186). Commenting on *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), Claire Tomalin (2011) also writes, ‘Dickens knew his Shakespeare, and was no more tied to realism than Shakespeare’ (260).

his bones. The 'skeleton' imagery in *Girl in a Blue Dress* may also point to Dickens's fear of exposing his family secrets (the skeleton in his closet) to the public.

If Alfred feels that his public sucks him dry, he has similar feelings towards his family. In a joke he tells about his daughter, Kitty, we see a hint of his true feelings about his offspring: 'she can take a man's finger off in one bite. Wait till you have children of your own – you'll find they are cannibals of the worst order' (131). He also complains to Wilhelmina, '*I have to rent half of the habitable houses in London for my multitude of ungrateful dependants*' (408) and Dodo admits that 'We must have seemed such an ungrateful set of dependants – not one of us earning our bread' (409).³⁹ If they are not earning their own bread, it is because Alfred is the family's bread – they live on his words; his *body* of work. This is echoed by Dickens's lamentation that he had 'the largest family with the smallest disposition for doing anything for themselves' (qtd. In Kaplan, 1988:497). After he passes away, the family continues to feed upon him; and divvying up of his belongings. According to Sissy, 'The girls and I shall need to furnish a new house, Alfie and Caroline have asked for Alfred's wardrobe and some looking-glasses, and Eddie wants to keep his own dressing-table and bed' (231). Here, the family members fight for pieces of their famous ancestor. The rest of the furniture ends up going to auction; the sale brings to mind George Augustus Sala's (1858-59) description of a Victorian auction house as a kind of meat market: 'I must acquit the respectable firm, whose thronged sale-room I have edged myself into, of selling by auction such matters as human flesh and blood' (169).

But ultimately in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, it is the public who receive the harshest and clearest criticism as man-eaters. Kitty talks about the clamouring crowds lining the road on the way to Alfred's funeral: 'As if it's not enough that we've had to share every scrap of him with his Public for all these years, but no, they had to be centre stage even today, as if it were *their* father – or *their* husband –' (2). This suggests that both the family and the public have cannibalised the author, consuming 'every scrap of him' for years. Kitty adds, 'You'd have expected, wouldn't you, that after giving them every *ounce* of his blood every day of his existence, at least they'd let

³⁹ Dickens commented on his cannibalistic family: 'I am amazed and confounded by the audacity of his [his father's] ingratitude. He, and all of them, look upon me as a something to be plucked and torn to pieces for their advantage. They have no idea of, and no care for, my existence in any other light. My soul sickens at the thought of them' (qtd. in Tomalin, 2011:146).

him have some peace and dignity at the end?’ (2). Note the reference to blood – the public is a collective and insatiable vampire, drinking Alfred until he dies, and even then, they will not stop. The family surely feels the greediness of his readership, as one member jealously comments, ‘The Public has had its pound of flesh from the Gibson family’ (326-327). This is to some extent ironical, as Dickens himself ‘initiated the characteristically Victorian relationship between the writer and his public’, which is described by Thackeray as a kind of ‘communion’ (Lonoff, 2002:181). In fact, Dickens valued a tight bond with his readers, as he wrote in an announcement in *Master Humphrey’s Clock* (1840-41): ‘to commune with you in any form, is to me a labour of love’ (qtd. in Pykett, 2002:59) – it is interesting that Dickens chose the word ‘commune’, which signifies a far closer unity with his readers than would ‘communicate’. However, in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, this closeness between the author and his readers is portrayed as incredibly oppressive and dangerous. Alfred, the subject of the public’s worship, is also the victim of its cravings. It is understandable, then, that when his ghost materialises in front of Dodo towards the end of the novel, he still expresses his fear of being consumed: ‘Now I’m afraid that in order not to turn into a roast dinner for some undeserving demons who are even now sharpening their forks, I must be gone immediately’ (414).

iii. *Gaynor Arnold: The cannibal*

We have seen cannibalism represented in two strands in *Girl in a Blue Dress*. First, Dickens is portrayed as a sexual aggressor and cannibalism is used to describe his relationship with women. Second, Dickens is portrayed as a victim of cannibalism. The two representations correspond respectively with the themes of the novel and the relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian. Through the representation of Dickens as a sexual cannibal, Arnold achieves her aim – to show the immobility of nineteenth-century women and to give voice in particular to one such imprisoned woman, Catherine Dickens. Yet her portrayal of Dickens as the victim of cannibalism also reveals her own ambivalent incorporation of the author. Below, I will investigate Arnold’s use of Dickens further and expose her as a literary cannibal herself, as well as show how these twin strands, that is, Dickens as eater and Dickens as eaten, speak to the two characteristics of neo-Victorian cannibalism: the desire to commune with the past and the need to express an individual identity.

Arnold's objective, to give voice to Catherine, a marginalised historical woman, is in keeping with attempts by other feminist writers over the past few decades to redress history through fiction. Marina Warner (2003 [2002]) comments:

Since the Eighties, women writers in particular have been recomposing 'the book of memory' in order to give muted subjects their voice: novelists like Louise Erdrich, Cynthia Ozick and Maxine Hong Kingston have been actively engaged in reconstituting, through empathy and imagination, lost histories and lost strands of courage and invention; they have summoned reserves of 'Negative capability' in order to engage passionately with the past. Adrienne Rich, the American poet, has been credited with coining the term, 're-visioning', with reference to the political enterprise, with feminism, of casting the past, of reascribing value, of working against the grain of received opinion and received stories. If history is an agreed fable, as Voltaire said – 'l'histoire est une fable convenue' – then any initiative to change things must begin with stories. (467)

Providing 'muted subjects' with a means of expression is exactly what Arnold does in *Girl in a Blue Dress*. She makes Catherine Dickens's stand-in Dorothea Gibson the first person narrator of the novel, a move which allows the Victorian woman to speak in her own voice. That this was Arnold's intention is clear in her own proclamation in the 'Afterword' that 'in Dorothea Gibson I have tried to give voice to the largely voiceless Catherine Dickens'. Her use of Dodo as a narrator in *Girl in a Blue Dress* is especially interesting if we compare the book to other neo-Victorian novels about Dickens, which do not pay much attention to Catherine.⁴⁰ That Arnold has at least partially chosen to use Dodo as narrator for feminist considerations is hinted at in the novel when the character says to her friend Michael O'Rourke (possibly a stand-in for John Foster): 'It makes you all *uncomfortable* when a woman voices her views' (406). Finally, Arnold also uses other women within the novel as a kind of chorus to encourage Dodo's self-expression. Her mother tells her, 'You could tell your own side of the story' (279) and her daughter, Kitty, pleads, 'If you want to write, why not try something for yourself?' (434)

In the historical discourse, Catherine is often a shadowy figure who lurks in the background.⁴¹ Bowen (1956) comments that 'It is noticeable that the main sources for the life story of Charles

⁴⁰ As mentioned in fn. 8, neo-Victorian novels which revisit Dickens's life often employ Wilkie Collins as the focalised narrator. If there is a woman narrator, she is likely to be Georgina Hogarth or Ellen Ternan. Exemplary is Jeff Rackham's *The Rag & Bone Shop*, which uses the trio – Collins, Hogarth and Ternan – as speakers.

⁴¹ This situation has been somewhat remedied with the publication of *Girl in a Blue Dress* and a new biography of Catherine Dickens. See fn. 10.

Dickens are practically a blank when Mrs. Dickens's history comes to be written' (81)⁴² and Dinah Birch (2011) remarks that Dickens's biographers have often turned Catherine into a 'bland and stupid cipher'. In *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Dodo grasps her situation well; she says, 'of course no one will even *think* of Dorothea Millar except as a footnote to the life of Alfred Gibson!' (405) Arnold fleshes out this 'footnote' in history and expands it to a book-length work, decentring the Victorian author's position. In addition to giving a voice to Dodo, Arnold offers her reconciliation with the other women in Alfred's life: she talks to Sissy and Wilhelmina, individually, and reaches an understanding with them, woman to woman. At the end of the novel, Dodo also regains her position as mother to her children, from whom she was forced to separate. Certainly stretching the suspension of disbelief, Arnold also stages a meeting between Dodo and Queen Victoria, 'the most powerful woman in England' (164), emphasising the bond shared by two widows.⁴³ Stretching verisimilitude even further, Arnold fashions the scene to present Dodo as the stronger of the two, presenting her as better at dealing with grief and having a forward outlook on women's position in society. While the Queen believes that 'the highest role of a woman can aspire to [...] is that of wife and mother' (164), Dodo questions why 'one's sex should condemn one for ever to a particular sphere' (ibid.). Here, Arnold promotes Dodo to a higher place in Victorian society and history by using the most Victorian figure of them all.

'[W]orking against the grain of received opinion and received stories' is also Arnold's goal. In the book, she makes it clear that it is Alfred's story which is the 'received story', as indicated in the following conversation between Dodo and her servant, Wilson:

'I want to know what ordinary people thought. What the great Public thought.'
 'They believed him, of course. When he said as he was honourable and had behaved himself, they took it as the Truth.'
 'Thank you, Wilson,' I say. She is right. Of course they believed him. Anything else would be out of the question. (100)

The public, then, believes the story that Alfred tells them, but in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, readers are conditioned to believe the story that Dodo tells them, namely, hers. In her story, she and other

⁴² This remark is probably inspired by Dickens's own description of his marriage: 'a page in my life which once had writing on it, has become absolutely blank, and it is not in my power to pretend that it has a solitary word upon it' (qtd. in Birch, 2011:28).

⁴³ In real life, Queen Victoria sent a commiserating telegram to Catherine Dickens upon Dickens's death, either because she did not know about the couple's estrangement or she preferred to follow propriety.

women are recast as Dickens's cannibalised victims and we hear their grievances one by one. Dodo's story turns Dickens into a villain and confronts the 'agreed fable' about him. While texts such as those by Michael Slater focus on 'Dickens's own experience of women' (Slater, 1983:xi), neo-Victorian fiction often offers an alternate representation of history. In *Girl in a Blue Dress*, cannibalism is conceived as a metaphor signifying male domination and transgressive sexual behaviour. It stresses Dickens's aggressive domination of the women in his life and their willing but also helpless submission. Arnold's allusions to cannibalism-themed fairy tales such as 'Red Riding Hood' and 'Bluebeard' are particularly clever, for they suggest that Dickens's victims are similar to those in the fairy stories. It would also seem that Arnold has identified the potential of fairy tales to discuss subversive subject matter, a technique used most notably by Angela Carter and other feminist writers. It is through such a depiction of Dickens that Arnold hopes to challenge the conventional image of the author and give voice to his wife.

Arnold's attempt fits the first half of Cora Kaplan's (2007) description of Victoriana: 'self-conscious rewriting of historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality' (3). It also speaks to the need for the author to assert an identity separate from the Victorian past. While Arnold has incorporated Dickens, the very model of a Victorian celebrity, she has done this through Catherine and thus undermined the received version of the author's life, a version largely constructed by himself. Arnold provides a modern feminist critique of the Victorian era, which while it relies on the period, also presents a separate view of it which could not have existed in the nineteenth century. Here, we see the development of a 'neo-Victorian' identity which, although it depends on the past for sustenance, has transformed this history into something new.

Yet, Arnold's depiction of Dickens as a victim of cannibalism at the hands of his family and his public complicates an easy categorisation of *Girl in a Blue Dress* as purely feminist and revisionist. For Arnold to give voice to Catherine, it is unnecessary to portray her husband as a sympathetic victim. Arnold's book is therefore not simply a denigration of the Victorian author but a more nuanced study of him. The ambiguity of this portrayal may find its ultimate expression at the end of the novel: *Girl in a Blue Dress* closes with the image of Dorothea taking up her pen: 'I hold it high up so I don't dirty my fingers. I dip it in the ink. And I start to write'

(438). One may be tempted to believe that what Dodo commences to write is *Girl in a Blue Dress* itself, that is, her own story, just like Matilda in *Mister Pip* (2006) who writes the first sentence of the novel at the end. But Dodo is in fact writing the ending of *Ambrose Boniface*, the purportedly unfinished mystery novel by Alfred.⁴⁴ Earlier, Alfred's spirit has visited Dodo, pleading her to complete his novel: '*Ambrose Boniface* needs concluding. And you, Dodo, will be the one to see to it' (414).⁴⁵

Many readers may find it hard to accept that Alfred would choose Dodo as his literary successor and indeed, Arnold has Kitty, the elder daughter, express this incredulity: 'Why would he have asked *you*, of all people? He wouldn't even let us mention your *name* when he was alive!' (433) Why, then, does Arnold give Dodo a voice only to finally undermine and condemn her to be her husband's mouthpiece? Again Arnold has Kitty raise this concern, 'If you want to write, why not try something for yourself? Are you content to be his echo?' (434) Dodo thinks to herself in response to her daughter's question, 'I want to tell her that even to be his echo would be a great honour' (434). Dodo's answer neither fits comfortably with the agenda of the book ('to give voice to the largely voiceless Catherine Dickens') nor the historical Catherine's literary inclinations.⁴⁶

I interpret Dodo's response as a confession by Arnold in which she inadvertently betrays her desire to emulate and commune with Dickens and 'be his echo'. This conflation between the author (Arnold) and the character (Dodo) might also explain the supernatural visitation of Dodo by Alfred's ghost. The appearance of ghosts in neo-Victorian fiction is common. Gutleben (2001) sees spirits as apt metaphors for 'the haunting nature of the Victorian ancestors' (190).⁴⁷ In *Girl in a Blue Dress*, I believe that Alfred's ghost not only visits Dodo, his wife, but also Arnold, the

⁴⁴ In real life, Dickens left *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) unfinished and it is this novel that several neo-Victorian novelists rework. See fn. 15.

⁴⁵ Alfred's ghostly appearance reminds one of the visitations of the author George Withermore in Henry James's story 'The Real Right Thing' (1899). However, while the spirit of Withermore discourages his biographer from his task, Alfred here encourages Dodo to complete his unfinished novel.

⁴⁶ Catherine Dickens was well-read, but there was no evidence that she aspired to write fiction, although she authored a cookery book, *What Shall We Have for Dinner? Satisfactorily Answered by Numerous Bills of Fare for from Two to Eighteen Persons* (1852).

⁴⁷ The predominance of the supernatural in neo-Victorian fiction is also analysed in the publication of Tatiana Kontou's *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From the Fin de Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (2009) and Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham's edited volume *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010).

contemporary author. The conversation between the husband and wife can be viewed as a wish-fulfilling exchange Arnold writes for *herself*: the Victorian author grants the wife and the female writer the permission to write *for* and *as* him. For a writer, being asked by Dickens's spirit to finish his book would seem to be an honour and recognition. This is however hardly an ideal feminist reconciliation and resolution for an estranged wife.

Before Dodo starts writing, she 'almost feel[s] Alfred's blood running through [her] veins' (438).⁴⁸ It is the pulsation of Alfred's blood *inside* her that prompts Dodo to begin to write (438). Previously in the novel, Alfred has repeatedly complained about being sucked dry by the vampiric public and left a mere 'skelington'. Here, Dodo is shown to be the final person in the book to consume the author's blood, which she feels in her veins. But it is also possible to interpret that outside the novel, one more person is consuming Dickens – Arnold, who desires to commune with the Victorian author and in some sense have Dickens's blood running through *her* own body, thus becoming his literary descendent. The conflicting forces, or aggressive ambivalence, at work in the novel is manifest in the dual representation and treatment of Dickens: cannibal on one hand and victim on the other. In this portrayal, Arnold is thus commenting, intentionally or not, on her own aggressive incorporation of the nineteenth-century author as well as on the ambivalent and cannibalistic nature of the neo-Victorian.

V. *Wanting*: A tale of multiple cannibalisms

i. Empire, autopsies and cannibalism

In 'Australia's "Other" History Wars' (2010b), Kate Mitchell remarks that 'in recent decades, both novelists and historians have returned obsessively to the story of the European "settlement" of Australia' (254). Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* is one such novel; it provides a sympathetic and provocative retelling of the colonial history of Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania).⁴⁹ Flanagan

⁴⁸ This is reminiscent of what Mamie Dickens says: 'It is a glorious inheritance to have such blood flowing in one's veins' (qtd. in Schor, 1999:2).

⁴⁹ Flanagan has previously explored the life of colonial convicts in his novel *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001), which depicts the English convict and artist William Buelow Gould's life in Tasmania. Matthew Kneale's neo-Victorian novel *English Passengers* (2000), like *Wanting*, focuses on the indigenous people of the island and recounts the brutality of the colonisation of Tasmania by the English.

uses the theme of cannibalism insistently throughout the text, particularly in connection to the treatment of Mathinna, an Aboriginal orphan girl, to comment on and critique the British empire's treatment and exploitation of the land and its people. Flanagan's use of the cannibalism trope and its application to British imperialism in Australia is consonant with the general association among critics between the practices of imperialistic expansion and cannibalism. According to Peter Hulme in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (1998), for example, 'imperialism is itself a form of cannibalism' (5) and 'the association between cannibalism and Western imperialism is impossible to ignore' (7). Although much of Flanagan's novel focuses on Mathinna and her relationship with Sir John Franklin and his wife, another strand of the book is devoted to Dickens's life in London. While the Victorian author's connection to Australian Aboriginal history may at first seem tenuous, I argue that Flanagan's inclusion of Dickens helps strengthen and consolidate the text's core criticism of the 'catastrophe of colonisation' ('Author's Note', 256). However, like *Girl in a Blue Dress*, this portrayal of Dickens is ambivalent, an ambivalence which reveals Flanagan's own cannibalism of Dickens and points to the contemporary writer's simultaneous desire to appropriate and destroy the Victorian author's influence within his work.

The theme of cannibalism is employed on several levels in *Wanting* to advance the idea that British colonialism in Australia was cannibalistic. The first and perhaps least overt mode is through the real life figure of George Augustus Robinson, the Protector of Aborigines, and his scientific experiments on the indigenous people of Tasmania, who according to Patrick Brantlinger (2011) were 'at first peaceful and only rarely accused of cannibalism' (46). Early in the book, we are introduced to Robinson in the settlement of Wybalenna on Flinders Island. Here, in his role as Protector, he is tasked with civilising the local Aborigines, Van Diemonians, as well as discovering why they are 'vanishing' from the island. On one level, the novel is an attempt to fictionalise the real decline of the Tasmanian Aborigines, an event which Flanagan describes as a 'terrible anguish' ('Author's Note', 256).⁵⁰ In *Wanting*, this decline is largely attributed to English colonialism, a fact which seems lost on Robinson. Apart from the Black War (1828-32), a general term for conflicts between the Aborigines and the colonists, the novel

⁵⁰ In Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), one of the characters advances a social Darwinian explanation of the Aborigines' decline, seeing their racial inferiority as a cause of their near-extinction.

suggests that the introduction of European diet, clothing, habits and diseases, passed through infected blankets, was responsible for their diminishing population (2).

It soon becomes clear that not only are Robinson's efforts misguided, but sinister. As the narrative advances, the title 'Protector' becomes increasingly and more uncomfortably ironic, especially when Robinson begins cutting up the local Aborigines' bodies in the hope of finding the scientific cause of their deaths. As a result, he ends up 'surrounded by corpses, skulls, autopsy reports' (19), a characterisation in which he is possibly being likened to a Conradian Kurtz. The troubling nature of the scene is heightened when one considers that it also suggests the possible deprivation of the natives of their traditional burial practices. Paul Turnbull (2001) points out that 'the Tasmanian peoples' mortuary ceremonies involved treating the body in ways that rendered the skull scientifically useless' (13). For the Protector to be able to use the bodies *scientifically*, the Aborigines would possibly have had to be stripped of the cultural and religious benefits of proper burial.

Although autopsies may not normally be seen as cannibalistic, it is not unusual to connect the dissection of bodies with cannibalism. H.L. Malchow in *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1996) writes about the 'cannibalism of the dissection room' (79), in which the autopsies of dead women and 'black bodies' offered the opportunity for a kind of colonial scientific exploration of the human anatomy. In Dickens's own *The Pickwick Papers*, he humorously associates dissection with food.⁵¹ Body-mutilation and cannibalism is also linked in Flanagan's novel. In a later chapter, Dickens, an ardent defender of Sir John Franklin, composes a response to John Rae's report about the possibility that Franklin's expedition to the Arctic descended into cannibalism. In it, Rae, after having interviewed Inuit witnesses, cites 'the

⁵¹ From *The Pickwick Papers*:

'Nothing like dissecting, to give one an appetite,' said Mr Bob Sawyer, looking round the table.

Mr Pickwick slightly shuddered.

'By the by, Bob,' said Mr Allen, 'have you finished that leg yet?'

'Nearly,' replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke. 'It's a very muscular one for a child's.'

'Is it?' inquired Mr Allen carelessly.

'Very,' said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full.

inescapable matter of mutilation of the bodies' as a sign of cannibalism.⁵² Dickens rejects this evidence with the question, '*Had there been no bears thereabout, to mutilate the bodies; no wolves, no foxes?*' (42 emphasis original), implying that wild animals are responsible for the disfigurement of the crew members and the wounds, not cannibalism. In the context of the book, then, the Protector's dissection of the indigenous bodies in the colony is coloured by cannibalistic overtones. His medical treatment of the dead Aborigines is suggestive of the empire's cannibalism of its colonised subjects.

Perhaps the Protector's brutality is most vivid in the following scene, in which he systematically decapitates the body of King Romeo, the 'last of the Port Davey kings' and Mathinna's father:

At the autopsy's end, the Protector took out of a wooden case a meat saw he kept specially sharpened and reserved for one purpose only. He favoured it because its ebony handle was heavily crosshatched, allowing him to maintain a firm grip even once his hand was wet, thereby ensuring the neatest job. [...] He returned to the corpse. He placed the saw's edge precisely in the nape of the neck. [...] He drew the saw carefully across the skin to score a red guiding line. Then, good tradesman that he was, he completed the job with long, firm strokes, counting them as he went. It took just six to saw off King Romeo's head. Careful as the Protector was, he was annoyed to feel his hands greasy with blood. (19-20)

The Protector's 'meat saw' is for 'one purpose only' – head-sawing. This suggests that, first, he sees Aboriginal bodies as mere meat, and second, that this is not the first time the Protector has severed a head from a corpse. Robinson's detached attitude towards the process is underlined by the fact that he is 'annoyed' by the grease of King Romeo's blood on his hands; he no longer has compassion for 'his friend' (69) but instead regards the body as a scientific curiosity or irritation. Later, we learn he has 'flensed, boiled up and rendered down' (69), in other words, *cooked*, King Romeo's head – preparations required for turning it into an object suitable for phrenological examination. Again, this treatment of the skull suggests that King Romeo has been denied the accepted ritual for treating dead bodies, a ritual he himself performed on his deceased wife (67).

⁵² According to Claire Tomalin (2011), although the matter is still contentious, 'In 1997 the Inuit account seems to have been vindicated when the bodies of some of the men were found, and clear evidence of cannibalism discovered' (462).

In his portrayal of the Protector, Flanagan incorporates the history of the procurement of indigenous skulls in colonial Australia. European scientists and collectors were fascinated by the Aborigines' skulls and actively sought them for investigations and trade. According to Paul Turnbull (2001), the phrenological examination of indigenous Australians played an important role in 'how the nature, origins and destiny of indigenous peoples were viewed amongst the colonial elite' (5). Often, the results of the cerebral studies led investigators to unfavourable conclusions about the Aborigines; that they had little or no capacity for civilisation (Turnbull, 2001:6) – thereby justifying racial discrimination and colonisation. Apart from suggesting that King Romeo has been deprived of his cultural heritage, Flanagan also uses the boiling of his head to invert our traditional view of the identity of the cannibal. On Charles Wilkes's *Narrative* (1845), Paul Lyons (2001) writes that the skull is used as a prop to authenticate the natives' practice of cannibalism (135). In *Wanting*, it is the Westerner instead of the indigenous people who is seen cooking the skull and consuming it for scientific purposes.⁵³

King Romeo's skull is later presented as a 'gift' to Lady Jane, the wife of Sir John Franklin, Governor of Tasmania: 'Before arriving, Lady Jane had requested in writing a scientific specimen—a skull from what she termed “the vanishing race”' (69). Her request suggests that the prospect of the Aborigines' possible extinction only adds value to their remains. Although her guardianship of Mathinna, which will be discussed below, suggests she does not welcome the disappearance of the local residents, she is nonetheless pleased with the offering, especially since it belonged to King Romeo, and therefore represented 'one of the finest specimens of its race' (68). No phrenologist herself, Lady Jane still delights in intellectual discussions of the 'scientific' understanding of the races and shows the skull to learned men of Phrenology to 'test them', as if in a parlour game, to see if they can establish the identity of its owner – 'a king of the Van Diemonian savages' (30).⁵⁴ Lady Jane, like a collector, relishes owning and displaying the

⁵³ That Europeans were themselves cannibalistic at one time can be seen in their consumption of medicines extracted from human body parts. Recent books such as Louise Noble's *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (2011) and Richard Sugg's *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (2011) remind us that 'for several hundred years, peaking in the 16th and 17th centuries, many Europeans, including royalty, priests and scientists, routinely ingested remedies containing human bones, blood and fat as medicine for everything from headaches to epilepsy'; that 'In short: Not long ago, Europeans were cannibals' (Dolan, 2012).

⁵⁴ John Thieme (2001) also identifies some phrenologically-related themes in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*: 'It takes only a slight stretch of the imagination of the criminal mentality and the slightly later Victorian project of trying to identify the salient features of the “primitive” mind, through such activities as the dismemberment and measuring of

bodily remnants of the ‘Other’ as artefacts (she even shows off the skull to Dickens at one point [30]). Although the novel presents her as somewhat callous towards Romeo’s remains, in her treatment of Mathinna the book also presents Lady Jane as motivated by a charitable desire to help the Aboriginal race, albeit a desire based on conventional yet misguided nineteenth-century British attitudes towards race and the civilising process.

ii. Mathinna: The cannibalised

Through the description of the Protector’s dissection of Aboriginal corpses and his boiling of King Romeo’s head, both of which have associations with cannibalism, Flanagan’s narrative is an act of remembering the treatment of the indigenous Tasmanian people under colonial rule. The novel’s extended metaphor for the cannibalistic relationship between the empire and the colony, however, rests primarily in the story of the seven-year-old Aboriginal girl Mathinna, who is adopted by the Franklins. Flanagan’s use of an orphan, who often represents ‘a vital strain’ in novels (Auerbach, 1975:395), is an homage to the Victorian novel and Dickens in particular. According to Laura Peters (2000), ‘the Victorian culture perceived the orphan as a scapegoat – a promise and a threat, a poison and a cure’ (2). A ‘stock character’ (Letissier, 2010:77), the orphan ‘exercised a particular fascination for Dickens, who could hardly present a child without depriving it of one or both parents’ (Tomalin, 1991[1990]:47). The orphan also fits Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben’s analysis in *Neo-Victorian Tropes of Trauma: The Politics of Bearing After-Witness to Nineteenth-Century Suffering* (2010), which suggests that ‘neo-Victorian novels prefer to particularise trauma by depicting specific victims, with the particular example standing for a whole class or people’ (29). In *Wanting*, the orphaned Mathinna is a specific victim of colonialism and cannibalism singled out to represent Aborigines as a whole. Likewise, the Franklins, whose Englishness is repeatedly emphasised throughout the text, come to represent the empire. In this light, Mathinna’s adoption by the couple, which is a kind of social, educational and religious ‘experiment’ or ‘project’ (69, 118, 128, 130, 136), is a metaphor for

Aborigines’ skulls, as a way of lending legitimacy to the sub-Darwinian thinking that attempted to find a scientific basis for racial discrimination’ (112). What is perhaps implicit in Carey’s novel is made explicit in Flanagan’s text.

Britain's attempt to bring civilisation to the Tasmanian colony.⁵⁵ The couple's adoption of the black girl reflects a view held by some colonists that the Aborigines' capacity for civilisation might be improved through 'education and paternal guidance' (Turnbull, 2001:6). Lady Jane believes that they can provide Mathinna with 'the most modern education an Englishwoman can receive' (121).⁵⁶ Like many of the empire's colonial efforts, in which the British forced their interests and institutions upon local populations in the belief that it was a necessary condition for their improvement, Lady Jane adopts the girl without her consent as a means of saving her from her perceived backwardness.

Flanagan's representation of Mathinna's forced adoption also evokes the coloniser's illegal removal and relocation of indigenous children. The uprooting of children from their families is strikingly echoed in Lady Jane's attitude towards Mathinna: 'from birth children must breathe in the fresh air of civilisation, not the stinking miasma of forests' (129). Mathinna's encounter with her adoptive parents, then, sheds light on the indigenous child's experience with the English colonists. In its use of a relatively unknown historical figure as one of the main characters, *Wanting* is also in line with the shift of focus of Victorian studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s from the 'grand historical narratives of wars, prime ministers, governments and economic change' to 'the fragmentary records of 'ordinary' individuals and their 'experience' of historical change' (Maidment, 2001:153). Thus, *Wanting* must be considered a deliberate act of post-colonial revisionism on Flanagan's part and his attempt fulfils the second half of Cora Kaplan's (2007) description of Victoriana: 'self-conscious rewriting of historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of [...] race and Empire' (3).

In *Wanting*, Mathinna's body is often fetishised. In fact, some of the impetus of the novel can be found in her naked feet:

Flanagan first came across her in a Hobart Museum where he was shown an unusual watercolour portrait of the girl wearing a red dress. The curator then pulled up the frame to reveal that the picture had been cropped, explaining that Mathinna's bare feet

⁵⁵ The idea of Australia as a place for colonial 'experiments' is discussed by Denis Judd (1996): 'the Australian colonies were to receive hundreds of thousands of free immigrants, and to be the subject of daring, if not always successful, experiments in social engineering' (30).

⁵⁶ One is reminded of 'Minute on Indian Education' (1835) where Thomas Babington Macaulay argues that English education is the only thing that can lift Indians out of superstition.

embarrassed her adoptive parents, who were the island's governor and his socially ambitious wife. Mathinna's refusal to wear shoes betrayed her savage provenance, so they cut her off at the ankles. ('Interview', 2009)

The phrase 'cut her off at the ankles' is chilling, perhaps intentionally. Although it refers to the framing of Mathinna on the painting, it echoes the real (European) savagery in *Wanting* and one is reminded of the Protector's mutilation of the Aborigines' bodies. Flanagan explains that 'I thought there was this large story of love and its denial in those feet that had been framed out of the picture. I knew what the book was at that moment, I knew exactly what the emotion was' ('Interview'). While the girl's adoptive parents regarded her naked feet as unsavoury and wished to hide them, the contemporary writer finds them useful, even creatively inspiring, and refers to Mathinna's feet regularly, even obsessively, in *Wanting*.⁵⁷ Flanagan's focus on the girl's feet is likely to be carefully planned and one can sense his self-conscious fixation in the narrative. The repeated appearance of Mathinna's feet inevitably draws the readers' attention towards them and to a certain extent makes them complicit in and feel guilty about engaging in the colonial gaze. Still, the cropped feet primarily provide a metaphor for the historically marginalised, who are often deliberately 'cropped' from official narratives; and Mathinna, of whose life we only know the 'barest' detail ('Author's Note', 255), is such a subject. Her feet can be viewed as a metonym for the silenced subject as a whole.

Flanagan not only appropriates Mathinna's feet but her entire body. Both Lady Jane and Sir John desire the girl's body, a desire expressed in terms of cannibalism in the text. Before the adoption, the childless Lady Jane's longing to have children is sparked by the sight of Mathinna with a large white kangaroo skin over her shoulder, dancing: 'Lady Jane was shocked to sense some intolerable weight dissolving, to feel an unnameable emotion rising' (50). One aspect of Mathinna that particularly appeals to Lady Jane is the child's body, as she says: 'One might almost say [...] her body thinks' (53). The English woman 'was possessed of an overwhelming

⁵⁷ Some examples: 'She was barefoot in a filthy pinafore and a red woollen stocking hat' (10); 'Mathinna looked down at her naked feet, and so too for a moment did the Protector' (15); 'She [Lady Jane] remembered the softness of those dark eyes; the sight that once had angered her and now moved her so, of those bare feet. [...] I am so alone, she thought. Those bare, black feet' (28); 'He [a sawyer called Garney Walch] noticed her bare feet poking out from the rug's ragged bottom and, reaching down, he tweaked her big toe' (112); 'For though the Aboriginal child was dressed in a dark grey serge dress of a type that attracts the word sensible, poking out from beneath its hem were two large, splayed and very brown feet' (116); 'it was the sudden, unexpected flashing gleam of teeth that disarmed him [Sir John]. Gleam of teeth, swirl of red, puddle of eye, dance of feet' (132) and 'her dirty little feet' (152).

urge to touch the little girl' and says, 'you almost wish to hold the little wild beast and pet her' (51). Lady Jane's racism is obvious here: she sees the black child as a wild animal in need of domesticated, and she is driven by a motherly instinct to care for and protect the girl. This ambiguity highlights a certain cognitive dissonance the coloniser is not entirely able to maintain – while she may see Mathinna as less than human, on some fundamental and instinctual level, she reacts to the girl's intrinsic humanity.

Flanagan makes it clear that despite Lady Jane's maternal instincts, there is something cannibalistic about her relationship with Mathinna. This is particularly evident in a dining scene in which Lady Jane proposes to the Protector that she and her husband adopt the Aboriginal girl. The cosy interior of the dinner party is contrasted sharply with what is happening outside. While Lady Jane is speaking, a 'seemingly infinite population of half-starved curs was yelping' beyond the walls (69), echoing her own animalistic hunger and yearning. The Protector is uncomfortable with Lady Jane's suggestion: 'he had not anticipated the request now made across the dinner table. As a further course of roast black cygnets was served, Lady Jane announced she wished to adopt a native child, as though it were the final item to be ordered off a long menu' (69).⁵⁸ The association of Mathinna with food is not subtle here. She is discussed over dinner with Lady Jane as a kind of cannibalistic connoisseur choosing a prospective daughter among items for her delectation. The inanimate pronoun 'it' suggests that to the English adults, Mathinna is genderless and not quite human. '[A] further course of roast black cygnets' adds significant semantic weight, a 'black' of both the Aboriginal girl and the food. 'Cygnets' also echoes *Girl in a Blue Dress* in which Dickens's female victims are portrayed as birds. Black swans are native to Australia and Flanagan links the girl with the native fauna of her country. This association can also be seen in Mathinna's kangaroo skin garb, an image which the author returns to in the dinner scene: 'Lady Jane named the child she wanted above all others, the one she had watched dancing in the white kangaroo skin' (70). Several things are at work here. Flanagan may be suggesting that the whiteness of the animal skin contributes to Lady Jane's attraction to the girl. The donning of the skin also provides a variation of Freud's meal – in this case, we see the tribal member (Mathinna) dressed up not to consume the totem but to be consumed as a totemic

⁵⁸ This scene is reminiscent of a meal scene in *The Pickwick Papers* in which the Fat Boy conflates his food with his object of romantic interest, Mary (see Stone, 1994:78).

representation of her people. Finally, the use of the animal skin highlights that Lady Jane does not view Mathinna as fully human. This again echoes *Girl in a Blue Dress* in which there are several confluences between animals and people; these confluences complicate the cannibalism in both texts. As in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, we see a kind of disguised cannibalism in the scene as Lady Jane's consumption of Mathinna is mediated through her animal costume.

While Lady Jane's consumption of the young Aborigine is described in the dinner scene, Sir John's cannibalism of the girl is configured as rape. Although the relationship between rape and cannibalism may not be immediately evident, both involve violent incorporation or communion. According to Maggie Kilgour (1990), 'Like eating, intercourse makes two bodies one' (7); in this sense, cannibalism, an extreme form of 'eating', can be seen as comparable to rape, a violent form of intercourse. Flanagan presents the rape of Mathinna with strong allusions to the classical myth of Leda and the Swan, in which the god transforms into the bird to rape Leda.⁵⁹ When Lady Jane is told that Mathinna has been given the Christian name Leda, she jokingly makes reference to the ancient story: 'You must protect her from swans' (51).⁶⁰ Marina Warner (1994) believes that 'In myth and fairy tale, the metaphor of devouring often stands in for sex' (259); the reverse, that sex may stand in for devouring, could also be said to be true in *Wanting*. Given that Mathinna is associated to 'black cygnets' (69) in the dinner scene, the story of Zeus and Leda is particularly suggestive.

Apart from the implications of Mathinna-Leda's name, the rape is prefigured in other ways. Sir John is shown to have sexual, almost cannibalistic, appetites for the girl: 'Sir John would have buttered toast and toasted cheese prepared for her, and then would watch her greedy little mouth intently as the yellow fat oiled her hungry lips' (139).⁶¹ The sensual connection between Mathinna's consumption of 'buttered toast and toasted cheese' and Sir John's lust for her

⁵⁹ The Leda myth also appears in the Dickens narrative in the form of a painting in the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition (165-167), emphasising the connection between the two strands of the novel.

⁶⁰ Mathinna's renaming as Leda provides an echo of her father Towterer, who is given the name 'King Romeo'. According to Chris Healy (2001), 'Kings' was one of a number of terms of address for Aboriginal chiefs to make them sound 'familiar' to the West (25). And as we can see in the case of Mathinna, it is a process tinged with condescension and cruelty. Bestowing a name with classical and literary connections upon the girl, especially one with such brutal associations, is dehumanising means of depriving her of her individuality and native identity.

⁶¹ Perhaps a coincidence, Dickens was known to have a penchant for toasted cheese. For example, his son, Charley, wrote about his father's fondness for it (Tomalin, 2011:408).

‘hungry lips’ oiled by ‘yellow fat’ is evocative and troubling – not only because Mathinna is only ten years old, but also because it shows Sir John’s deliberate manipulation of the girl. He intentionally feeds her, knowing that he will be aroused by the effect of watching her eat. Although she is the one eating, the situation is also charged with cannibalistic overtones, especially in the image of lips oiled by ‘yellow fat’, presenting Mathinna almost as a roast bird with glistening skin.

There is a similar sense of deliberateness in Sir John’s preparation for the fancy dress ball during which Mathinna is raped. In his arrangements for the party, Sir John is at least on some level preparing to re-enact Zeus’s rape of Leda. He orders a black swan costume for the ball and then models it for his wife:

He had found a tailor [...] who had created the dark wings in a half-opened spread, such that it seemed Sir John might at any moment take flight. [...] The mighty black swan’s great wings swept forward and out, as if seeking their first purchase of air, and it made Sir John’s body—normally evocative only of ease—appear as though it were already tensing for a straightening, a moment of wondrous release. (146)

Sir John’s choice of costume is motivated by his fondness for ‘the black swan dance’ that Mathinna performs earlier in the narrative: ‘he particularly enjoyed [...] the black swan dance, in which she would jack-knife her body backward and jolt her arms forward and out, as if rising into flight’ (132-133). Lady Jane objects to the outfit on the grounds that it looks ridiculous, although one also wonders whether she senses something amiss in her husband’s enthusiastic selection of dress. Before she eventually convinces him just to wear a black swan mask, Sir John feebly attempts to defend his attire, grandly associating the costume with Napoleon: ‘Why, Napoleon himself had a bedhead made for Josephine out of a Van Diemonian black swan’ (145). This association with the French Emperor underlines Sir John’s sense of grandiose and self-importance, a sense also highlighted in sartorial connection to Zeus. By dressing up as a swan, Sir John is arrogantly and knowingly imitating the myth and the ancient god’s own transformation. Indeed, Flanagan is at pains to make it clear that Sir John knows the

mythological associations of the costume, going so far as to have one of the characters at the ball ask him: 'Are we no longer Your Excellency but Zeus himself?' (149).⁶²

The themes of colonial arrogance and of Englishmen as animals are extended in the fancy dress ball itself, which is themed 'bestiary' (145) and held on an Antarctic expedition ship, suggestively named *Erebus* (the Greek personification of darkness). Flanagan uses this setting to portray and heighten the sense of estrangement Mathinna experiences among the foreigners: 'all these men and women in their strange fanciful animal costumes—platypuses, griffins, centaurs, unicorns and wombats—leant down and tried to catch her attention' (147). Here we see the continued blending of animals and people, as well as the unsubtle implication of colonists as beasts. Wearing a wallaby mask herself, Mathinna is oppressed by others dressed as fiercer animals: 'Our princess of the wilds!' sighed a wolf'; 'The sweetest savage!' said a bear' (147).

At the ball, Mathinna dances with Sir John and falls into her free dance, shocking the other guests. Afterwards, Franklin gives in to his desire and rapes Mathinna:

Mathinna came out of a skipping slumber sensing a presence above her. She opened her eyes and was immediately terrified. Above her loomed the face of a giant black swan. She knew her life was over.

'Rowra [Devil],' Mathinna whispered.

After she collapsed, Crozier had carried the small child in his great arms down to his captain's cabin, a room only fractionally longer and wider than the cot in which he laid her to rest, and in which she had now woken.

'What?' said Sir John.

The child said not a word more.

Far away, the ball continued, the band played on.

He was all things and all things were him. Looking down on Mathinna, her diminutive body, her exposed black ankles, her dirty little feet, the suggestive valley of her red dress between her thin legs, Sir John felt thrilled.

And after, was thrilled no more. (152 emphasis original)

This scene begs for comparison with W.B. Yeats's poem 'Leda and the Swan' (1923). Interestingly, while in the poem the word 'body' closely precedes the word 'white', in *Wanting*,

⁶² Zeus is also mentioned in relation to the Greek temple that Lady Jane builds in the colony: 'Once, perhaps, she thought, Zeus did sport here, transforming into whatever animal he needed to be—a bull, a goat, a swan—in order to take yet another mortal or goddess unawares. At that moment a kangaroo came bounding across the temple' (132). Again the rape of Mathinna is ominously prefigured in this passage. The marsupial certainly recalls the skin Mathinna dons earlier in the narrative and suggests she in this new pastoral landscape will be Zeus's next victim.

‘body’ is followed by ‘black’, a deliberate distinction. Also, Flanagan’s description of Franklin’s post-consummation dejection, ‘And after, was thrilled no more’, is remarkably reminiscent of the Swan’s abjection in Yeats’s poem: ‘the indifferent beak could let her drop’ (L15). In the poem it is suggested that Leda might acquire Zeus’s ‘knowledge’ (L14) but it is unlikely that the sexual encounter will have any positive consequence for Mathinna-Leda. The black swan is native to Australia and by having Sir John dress himself as one, Flanagan portrays him as ‘going native’ and descending into the very people he dismisses as savages. (Sir John’s imitation of a wild animal is similar to Arnold’s characterisation of Dickens as the Big Bad Wolf – in that the predator disguises himself as an animal to commit an animalistic act.) The rape scene also provides a kind of double paedophilic crime: not only do we see Sir John force himself upon Mathinna, we also see an adult swan taking a cygnet. Considering the food associations made earlier between black cygnets and Mathinna, the rape additionally takes on highly cannibalistic overtones.

The rape scene is central to Flanagan’s revisionist aims within the novel, especially as a metaphor for British colonialism. As the representative of her native people, Mathinna’s sexual violation and incorporation, especially at such a tender age, reveals Flanagan’s view of the relationship between the colonialists and the colonised. Characterising colonialism as rape is a common trope in history and literary criticism, especially where Europe is the masculine rapist and the colonies as the feminised raped. Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (1994), for example, point out that ‘a dominant metaphor of colonialism was that of rape’ (4) and in *Colonialism-Postcolonialism* (1998), Ania Loomba comments that ‘a wide spectrum of representations encode the rape and plunder of colonised countries by figuring the latter as naked women and placing colonisers as masters/rapists’ (79). Flanagan uses a similar technique in *Wanting* where the theme of rape exists on both literal and metaphorical levels.⁶³ His retelling of the allegorical story of coloniser-as-rapist and colonised-as-raped is present in the violation of Mathinna, the close connection between sexual crime and cannibalism, the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan and Sir John’s descent into savagery, all of which the author yokes together to show different facets of colonial Tasmanian history.

⁶³ Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers* (2000) also features a raped Aboriginal woman. One of the first-person narrators of the novel, Peevay (named by the Europeans as ‘Cromwell’), is the son of an Aboriginal mother raped by a white convict.

Although it is the body of Mathinna that both Lady Jane and Sir John desire and cannibalise, in the end it is this same body which they use as an excuse not to bring the girl back to Britain. Sir John explains that ‘experience showed savages’ bodies were constitutionally incapable of surviving a robust climate; it was as proven and undeniable as were the advantages she had enjoyed which would ensure her future was bright indeed’ (182). But the real reason the Franklins abandon Mathinna is that their ‘experiment’ has failed. Lady Jane realises that ‘her experiment was the most ignominious failure, and that she must not suffer the further humiliation of taking Mathinna home to England’ (195). For all the Franklins’ supposed good intentions, once their efforts have proved, from their perspective anyway, ineffectual, the project is discarded and the Aboriginal girl is left to her own devices. Mathinna is first sent to St John’s Orphanage and later becomes an alcoholic prostitute, a career which ensures she will go on being sexually violated and manipulated: ‘She continued trading her body, because, along with a little writing and the quadrille, it was what she had learnt and finally come to understand as her only possibility for survival’ (227). The book dwells on the details of Mathinna’s final days and eventually she dies, drowned in a puddle.

In the end, we see that despite Lady Jane’s confession that ‘I loved her’ (198), the child (and by extension the indigenous people that she represents) is damaged by the civilising ‘experiment’. Still, Lady Jane is at least motivated by a desire, albeit misguided, to help Mathinna’s lot. However, Flanagan, more than just revealing the colonial project as an oft-misguided attempt to bring civilisation to Australia, presents it as much starker and more cynically self-interested. As one colonial character in the book says, ‘We didn’t come here for society and civilisation. We came here for what everyone who isn’t a convict comes here for: money’ (148). Through his different explorations of the often cannibalistic relationship between the British colonisers and the Tasmanian colonised, Flanagan investigates the violent and inhumane early history of his homeland. In this task, the author appropriates the historical Mathinna – one of those typical characters in neo-Victorian fiction ‘who have never had a proper voice, story, or discursive existence in literature’ (Kohlke and Gutleben, 2010:31) – presenting her as a symbol of the Aboriginal people, who were overwhelmed by their colonisers. Thus, the Franklins’ cannibalistic treatment of her suggests the methods and nature of British colonisation.

Flanagan uses Mathinna as his representative figure for Tasmanian Aboriginals. His form of revisionism does not aim to ‘correct’ the wrongs of history but to extend our understanding of the past beyond received notions of the British empire. His portrayal of Mathinna is designed to supplement the inadequate historical record of ‘the ex-centric, the marginalised, the peripheral’ (Hutcheon, 1996:482). That Flanagan does not make Mathinna the first-person narrator may be seen as a strange choice for an author attempting to give voice to a marginalised figure as Mathinna’s subjectivity is mediated.⁶⁴ One could also argue that Flanagan is in some sense continuing the exploitation of Aboriginals through his use of Mathinna (an interpretation discussed further in a later section). However, his choice of narration may not be so unjustified in the context of the novel itself, in which Mathinna refuses to learn how to read and write, perhaps because they are quite foreign to the oral tradition of her culture. Instead, she prefers to express herself through dancing, an art-form which is indigenous to her cultural heritage. This can be read as a rejection of Western technology and culture. Flanagan also demonstrates a certain (if somewhat cruel) honesty towards Mathinna, as he does not give her an easy and successful life but in fact presents her as repeatedly humiliated throughout the text. This representation is more pessimistic – and perhaps realistic – and can be interpreted as an act of remembering amidst a ‘culture of forgetting’ (Wallhead, 2003:14). In *Wanting*, Flanagan presents a revised colonial history, but one that shows one possible version of how things were, not as they should have been. The novel asks us not to forget historically silenced individuals but also makes it clear that fiction can offer no remedies for past injustice.

iii. Dickens: The cannibal

‘But what of Dickens?’, the omniscient narrator in *Wanting* asks at the beginning of Chapter 6, almost as if readers needed to be reminded that the novel is *also* about ‘the most popular writer of the day’ (71). The connection between Dickens and the characters in the Australian sections of the book may not be immediately obvious; one reviewer even describes the relationship between the Victorian author and the other characters as ‘shadowy’ (Boyd, 2009). Flanagan himself admits that the link between Mathinna and Dickens is ‘odd’, but he also firmly asserts that this

⁶⁴ Compare, for example, to Matthew Kneale’s *English Passengers*, in which the author utilises an indigenous narrator.

association is ‘undeniable’ (‘Author’s Note’, 256). Indeed, upon closer reading, the connection between the two strands of the novel, as well as how they serve Flanagan’s postcolonial critique, can be identified. In the following, I will discuss how the author presents Dickens in highly cannibalistic terms and how this fits his wider view of British colonialism. In Flanagan’s appropriation of Dickens, the ultimate nineteenth-century literary celebrity, we also see the twin motivations for the neo-Victorian’s incorporation of the Victorian: firstly, it speaks to the contemporary author’s goal of revising history and thus reveals his desire to express a separate self-identity; and secondly, Flanagan’s portrayal of Dickens as a cannibal is a self-reflexive comment on his own desire for communion with the Victorian author.

Mathinna and Dickens do not meet in the book; their stories are connected by the Franklins. After Sir John and Lady Jane’s departure from Tasmania, Sir John embarks on his fatal Arctic expedition to locate the fabled Northwest Passage. When he and his crew fail to return to England, Lady Jane, who refuses to believe that he has died, organises and supports a number of expeditions to look for her husband. She also wages a propaganda war to preserve Sir John’s image, especially after John Rae publishes a report suggesting that the explorer and his crew resorted to cannibalism for survival. Lady Jane meets Dickens, hoping to enlist him in her campaign and after hearing her story, the Victorian author, indignant, agrees to help. He dismisses the accusation of cannibalism, rejecting it as a lie told by the ‘Esquimaux’: ‘we have a race of thieving, murdering cannibals [the Esquimaux] asserting that England’s finest were transformed into thieving, murdering cannibals—what remarkable coincidence!’ (31). Dickens’s strong faith in the moral superiority of Englishmen leads him to the insistence that they could never descend into savagery. Flanagan suggests that Dickens’s involvement in the project does not stem entirely from a sense of moral righteousness but also from his own deep interest in the subject of cannibalism: after meeting Lady Jane, Dickens remarks to Wilkie Collins upon his decision to join her campaign, ‘I am rather strong on voyages and cannibalism’ (38).

Dickens mounts his defence of Sir John in several ways. He writes ‘The Lost Arctic Voyagers’ and publishes it in his *Household Words* (1854) to attack Rae’s report. He also co-writes (with Wilkie Collins) and stages the play *The Frozen Deep*, which is inspired by Sir John and set in the Arctic. *The Frozen Deep*, through the story of Richard Wardour (who is in part modelled on

Franklin), shows 'Englishmen meeting their ends nobly rather than as savages, their finest qualities triumphing over their basest' (78). In *Wanting*, the fictional Dickens comments on the play: 'A savage, [...] be he Esquimau or an Otaheitian, is someone who succumbs to his passions. An Englishman understands his passions in order to master them and turn them to powerful effect. Was and is that not Franklin?' (83). Dickens's deep personal commitment to Sir John's cause is evident when he decides to perform the role of Wardour and increasingly identifies with the character: 'I find myself more and more inhabiting, almost living, the part of Richard Wardour. [...] I was a starving and demented polar explorer soon to perish for want of food or warmth' (81).

This identification with Wardour is also a reflection of the author's growing connection to the real Sir John. After writing the article 'The Lost Arctic Voyagers', 'Dickens senses himself becoming joined to Sir John's doomed journey, and to that strange frozen world that held all their mysteries. He thought of how such great spirits as these would always endure stoically to the end, as would he in his marriage' (146). Dickens's association with Sir John is filtered through his personal life and he links the voyage with his own frozen relationship: 'for twenty years, had not his marriage been a Northwest Passage, mythical, unknowable, undiscoverable, an iced-up channel to love, always before him and yet through which no passageway was possible?' (35) The Victorian author equates Sir John's stoic resistance to cannibalism in the face of hunger to his own triumphs over desire to engage in extra-marital passion.

The fortitude of both author and explorer, and thus by extension the character of the empire generally, is undermined when it is revealed that Dickens himself had once made 'that error of passion' when he was younger: 'Had he not yearned to bite into Maria Beadnell's [Dickens's early unrequited love] thighs as keenly as the Esquimaux had wanted to feast on old Sir John's gentlemanly drumsticks?' (47) In light of this disclosure, in which Dickens is presented in cannibalistic terms, the Victorian author's adamant repudiation of the accusations of Franklin's barbarism seems less motivated by the author's strong belief in English nobility than by a profound emotional reaction to the charge itself. If Dickens once had sexually cannibalistic thoughts towards Maria Beadnell, he must also believe it might be possible that Sir John has resorted to man-eating. Flanagan does not only want the reader to see Dickens's and Sir John's

transgressions as individual lapses. Instead, he wants to present them as representative of the moral limitations of the empire as a whole. In *Wanting*, then, while Flanagan dramatises the cannibalistic nature of colonialism in the relationship between the Franklins and Mathinna, he also uses Dickens's transgressions to complement and consolidate the critique.

Dickens's sexual yearning to 'bite into Maria Beadnell's thighs' is clearly intended to be read as cannibalistic. To emphasise the point, Flanagan also portrays Dickens's attraction to another woman, the young actress Ellen Ternan, whom he meets through the staging of *The Frozen Deep*. Ternan becomes the subject of the author's intense interest, causing him to forgo marital duty and give in to his own desires, the fate he fears most. There is a sense of serious transgression in Dickens's relationship with Ternan. Indeed, Flanagan's strategy in *Wanting* is to compare the story of Dickens and Ternan with the paedophilic relationship between Sir John and Mathinna. Several places show a link between the Aboriginal child and the young British woman. For example, Ternan is described as 'the girl' (99), 'little more than a child' and 'childish' (156), terms reminiscent of Mathinna. Similarly, there is an echo of the Aborigine, who is often clad in a red dress (130, 132, 146), in a scene in which Ternan draws Dickens's attention to her pomegranate mantilla, saying, 'I am told it is the traditional colour for brides in India' (165).

If Ternan is like Mathinna, then Dickens is like Sir John. Dickens's cannibalistic desire for the actress, echoing Sir John's for the Aboriginal girl, is evocatively represented in following eating scene:

More from a sudden nervousness than any appetite, she placed a cherry she had been rolling in her fingers into her mouth, sucked the flesh for a moment as if it were a sweet, and then delicately rolled the still pulpy pit to her lips' edge, took it between thumb and forefinger and dropped it in a bowl.

Dickens stared at that spent stone with its wet threads of red flesh. He envied its good fortune. With a sudden movement, as unexpected to him as it was to her, he scooped the pip up and swallowed it. Looking back up, his eyes caught hers. (208)

In this sexually charged scene, Dickens does not eat Ternan *per se*, but only the cherry pip that has moments earlier been inside her mouth. The cannibalistic overtones are nevertheless suggestive. The 'wet threads of red flesh' of the fruit (cherries themselves already carry sexual connotations), probably still warm from the young woman's mouth, are suggestive of Ellen's

own moist and rosy flesh. Dickens's gluttonous consumption of the pip, driven by sudden passion, is a clear symbol of his ravenous desire to consume her, much as Mathinna's seductive eating of the buttered toasts inflames Sir John. The scene also recalls Dickens's words to Collins earlier in the book: 'We all have appetites and desires. But only the savage agrees to sate them' (79). In this scene, Dickens gives in to his desires, consuming the 'spent stone', an item not normally considered food, solely out of sexual excitement. In this act, Dickens is closer to the 'savage' than he would like to admit. In connecting fruit with sex, the passage has a number of literary predecessors. For example, one is reminded of the strawberry Alec holds for Tess in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) – 'she parted her lips and took it in' (42) – and Christina Rossetti's sensually tantalising poem 'Goblin Market' (1862), in which the orchard fruits (including cherries) are described as 'the fruit forbidden' (L479) by Laura, who succumbs to temptations and 'suck[s] their [the goblins'] fruit globes fair or red – / Sweeter than honey from the rock / [...] / she suck[s] until her lips were sore' (L128-129, L136). The similarities between Flanagan's work and Rossetti's are particularly striking, as 'sucked', 'red', 'sweet' and 'lips' are repeated in the passage from *Wanting*. Of course, the root of all these scenes is the biblical forbidden fruit from Eden. After the woman has tried the first taste, the man follows suit, giving in to his own untapped and base passions: first Eve then Adam, first Ternan then Dickens.

Dickens's abandonment of civilised behaviour continues later in the novel. On stage, when performing with Ternan in *The Frozen Deep*, he is physically close to her flesh and feasts on the arousing stimulation and rhythm of her body: 'His cheek pressed against her uncorseted belly. He could feel its softness pulsing in and out. [...] He was smelling her, hot, musty, moist' (241). Dickens, devouring Ternan sensually as if she is edible, must realise, at least on some level, the hypocrisy of giving in to his passions while portraying Wardour. In some sense, although the stakes are perhaps smaller, Dickens has become the cannibal Franklin. He realises his own transgression: 'And at that moment, Dickens knew he loved her. He could no longer discipline his undisciplined heart. And he, a man who had spent a life believing that giving in to desire was the mark of a savage, realised he could no longer deny wanting' (241). It is as though in the frozen land of his marriage, Dickens, hungry, emotionally deprived, has found sustenance in the form of the young Ellen Ternan. While he abhors those who succumb to base instincts as

‘savages’, Dickens is consumed by his own, and he satisfies his desires, turning himself into a kind of cannibal.

Within the novel, the staging of *The Frozen Deep* is presented deliberately ironically. Dickens uses the play to stress Sir John’s moral fortitude but it also allows the author to meet Ternan and acts on his own desires. This not only renders his defence of the explorer’s reputation unconvincing but also exposes the hypocrisy of the notions of British superiority and civilisation. Throughout *Wanting*, a distinction is drawn between ‘civilisation’ and ‘savagery’, the latter a term which according to Kristen Guest (2001) is ‘traditionally associated with cannibalism’ (4). There is an insistent differentiation between the racist British characters on the one hand and the ‘Van Diemonian Aborigines’ and the ‘Esquimaux’ on the other. Flanagan deconstructs this binary, primarily through the use of Dickens, who believes ‘We all have appetites and desires. But only the savage agrees to sate them’ (79). Within the logic of the novel, then, the difference between savagery and civilisation relies on one’s ability to resist the temptation to yield to passions and desires. Dickens asks at one point: ‘wasn’t that control precisely what marked the English out as different from savages?’ (43). The ironical stories of Sir John’s and Dickens’s descent into base desires, a similar story told twice and thus reinforcing one another and strengthening the thematic link, marks them as the cannibals in the novel and challenges the binaries of ‘civilisation’ and ‘savagery’. Each of their narratives also undermines the English imperialistic project, especially since the characters are meant to be read as representatives of Britain and the empire – Sir John is ‘a great Englishman in the stoutest English company’ (25) and Dickens is described as ‘the most famous Englishman of the age’ (162).⁶⁵ British imperialism often rested on the assumption that the Other was uncivilised and therefore needed to be colonised; yet, by portraying Dickens and Franklin as sexual cannibals, Flanagan collapses the difference between ‘civilisation’ and ‘savagery’, or rather, emphasises the kinship of the two,

⁶⁵ Similar sentiments can be found in Jeff Rackham’s *Rag & Bone Shop* – ‘[Dickens] became England’ (4) – and in Claire Tomalin’s biography of Dickens – ‘He was, and he continued to be, a national treasure, an institution, a part of what makes England England; and he continues to be read all over the world’ (2001:400). The connection between Flanagan’s expedition and the British empire is also made explicit in Tomalin’s (1990) following remark on *The Frozen Deep*, ‘Yet it did, hugely, helped perhaps by its theme of absent suffering men and anxiously awaiting women, which found an echo in so many Victorian households in the heyday of the Empire and the year of the Indian mutiny. Voyages like those of Darwin with the *Beagle* and Sir John Franklin to the Arctic naturally aroused tremendous interest and excitement’ (97-98).

and provides a provocative criticism that the English, succumbing to desires, are the savages themselves, not the Esquimaux or the colonised Aborigines.

iv. Richard Flanagan: The cannibal

While we have some evidence about Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan in real life, there is no indication that Sir John raped Mathinna, or even expressed any form of sexual desire towards the girl. Flanagan is clear about his novel being a work of fiction, not history: 'This novel is not a history, nor should it be read as one' ('Author's Note', 255). Of the relationship between Franklin and Mathinna, he also says that 'what Sir John's feelings were towards Mathinna—if he had any at all—appear to be knowledge now irrecoverable' (256). Flanagan's language here is intentionally ambiguous. Despite admitting that the sexual relationship is not based on any available facts, the author is not quite willing to dismiss it as a possibility altogether. He suggests that the 'knowledge' of their relationship is 'irrecoverable', and thus leaves the door open for any possible interpretations which he may wish to put forward. Such ambiguity perhaps lends a certain weight to his portrayal of Sir John as a paedophilic cannibal – if the 'knowledge' is lost, it is always possible that in fact he *was* a sexual predator. As Franklin is a stand-in for the British empire, this also reinforces Flanagan's argument about the cannibalistic nature of colonialism. These manipulations are well within the remit of the novel, but, especially in light of the earlier discussion of Melanie Benjamin's portrayal of Ruskin in *Alice I Have Been* and James Wilson's depiction of Turner in *The Dark Clue*, may raise ethical issues.

In presenting Franklin and Dickens as cannibals, Flanagan is himself cannibalising them. More troublingly, perhaps, he can also be said to cannibalise Mathinna in his representation of the emotional and sexual exploitation of the young girl. These passages are often shocking and demonstrate the author's readiness to sensationalise history at the expense of both the historical Sir John and Mathinna if it serves his aims of revisiting the colonial discourse. In her analysis of Yeats's 'Leda and the Swan', Elizabeth Butler Cullingford points out that the poem 'demonstrates what happens when a writer cares more about using explicitly sexual situations as a strategy' and raises concern about women being used as 'both the subjects of and subject to the

power of his [a writer's] imagination' (qtd. in Warner, 2002:113). It could also be argued that the act of using colonialism at all for one's own ends, particularly by a writer of European descent, makes him complicit in colonial cannibalism. More importantly, in his use of real historical figures, we also see Flanagan's own cannibalisation of the Victorian past and perhaps the clearest example of the process of neo-Victorian identity-formation through incorporation. He uses and reworks people such as Dickens and Franklin to create his own version of the past, one that could not have existed within Victorian notions of history. Even if Flanagan has tampered with the nineteenth-century celebrities' biography, his version of past events is in some ways more 'truthful' in its presentation of the realities of British colonialism.

Yet, although Flanagan successfully uses Dickens and Franklin to advance his arguments about colonialism, in *Wanting* he also reveals his apprehension about his at times sensational manipulation of these real people, especially in relation to the theme of cannibalism. Thus, much like Arnold in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Flanagan self-reflexively comments on his own incorporation of Dickens by presenting the author as a victim of cannibalism. In *Wanting*, Maria Beadnell and her family are seen as feeding on Dickens's body: 'Maria Beadnell and her vile family had treated him as little better than a corpse to play with, to feast upon for their own amusement' (43). Flanagan draws the reader's attention to the victimisation of Dickens by the women in his life, a reversal of Arnold's representation of him as the victimiser in his relationship with the opposite sex: 'Had not women failed him all his life? His mother. Maria Beadnell. His wife. Was it not obvious?' (79) We also see Dickens being consumed in the passages which describe the financial burden of taking care of his family: 'He liked seeing his daughters look as splendid as she did in the bonnet, but the cost! The cost! His children had no idea about money—they were as spendthrift as his own father had been, and, he feared, perhaps as doomed' (95). This echoes the portrayal of the cannibalistic family in *Girl in a Blue Dress*.

In his apprehension, we also see Flanagan's desire to commune with Dickens. At one point, the narrator of *Wanting* says: 'For those who had followed the greatest mystery of the age [Franklin's disappearance in the Arctic], the prospect of the most popular writer of the day putting forth his view on the sensation of the rumours of cannibalism was irresistible' (71). Here, it is as if the narrator is speaking directly for Flanagan, who admits that he himself could not

resist the sensational link between Dickens and Franklin. Even the book's title, *Wanting*, can be interpreted as encoding a Freudian allusion about Flanagan's own *wanting* to be associated with the Victorian author, whose name is guaranteed to move books.⁶⁶ In the novel, he emphasises Dickens's literary achievements: 'he remained the most popular writer in the land' (21) and 'the most famous Englishman of the age' (162). These instances highlight Dickens's importance as a symbol of the empire in the colonial narrative. They also betray the contemporary writer's admiration for his literary ancestor. Even though Flanagan's use of Dickens is intended to solidify the core criticism of Australian colonialism, Dickens is by no means an entirely obvious choice of character through which to explore Aboriginal history. Thus on some level Flanagan's use of the Victorian author reveals him as a literary influence and one that he wishes to emulate. This desire for communion with Dickens may rest partly on his connection to the literary history of Australia which has been outlined earlier, but is undoubtedly primarily driven by his stature within literary history – 'the most popular writer of the day' and one of the most famous of all time.

In satiating his desire to be associated with Dickens, Flanagan has become a kind of literary cannibal. His work demonstrates the conflicting characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction's relationship with the past: a desire for communion and a need to fashion a new self-identity. He uses Dickens in *Wanting*, but he must also contain and transcend him. This is amply demonstrated in the contemporary author's aggressive portrayal of his Victorian predecessor as cannibalistic. Not only is this representation itself a cannibalistic act, it is also the severest possible criticism of the Victorian author and can thus be viewed as Flanagan's attempt to undermine and destroy his literary influence. Flanagan also uses this characterisation to advance his goal of providing a revision of Australian colonial history that fills gaps of historical knowledge. In this act, which also cannibalises the biographies of the Franklins and of Mathinna, Flanagan creates an identity separate from the Victorian past. He also reveals his own apprehension at incorporating Dickens and the other historical personae: in particular, he portrays Dickens as a victim of cannibalism and reminds the reader of the Victorian author's greatness. Both of these reveal his ambivalent desire to commune with Dickens.

⁶⁶ Dickens also 'moves' academic publications. According to John Sutherland (2004), 'Dickens (buoyed up by *The Big Read* and TV adaptations) sells by the million; a critical monograph on Dickens, under the imprint of a prestigious university press, will do well to sell a few hundred' (31).

VI. Conclusion: The creation of new identities through cannibalism

This chapter studies Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* and Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*, two neo-Victorian novels that incorporate the biography of Dickens. They are both more interested in his life than his texts. This would not have been approved of by the Victorian author himself, who wrote in his will: 'I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works'. In their books, Arnold and Flanagan have partly adopted the roles of biographer and critic to present and criticise the nineteenth-century author's life. For them, certain topics are especially savoury and attractive, including those that have to do with Dickens's private affairs: scandalous, sensational, relatively little known but not overly obscure.⁶⁷ Indeed, while *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* incorporate Dickens to different extents, their foci is similar: his domestic life and love affair. They also demonstrate that, for them, accurately reconstructing Dickens's life is not an important issue. Both *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* neglect major elements of the author's biography and dramatically alter the chronology of others. In *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Dodo only meets the actress Wilhelmina Ricketts after Alfred Gibson's death whereas in real life, Catherine Dickens was forced to visit the Ternan family and apologise for her jealous behaviour. In *Wanting*, Dickens's sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, who in real life played an important role in the household, does not appear in the novel – a ruthless omission. The incorporation and readjustment of historical figures' lives, then, is 'fair game' in neo-Victorian fiction. Flanagan and Arnold do not intend to paint truthful biographical sketches of Dickens, but use his life as source material for producing good stories and, more importantly, to discuss contemporary issues of gender, racial inequality and postcolonial history.

Although they portray Dickens's life in different ways, Flanagan and Arnold both characterise him as a cannibal and use man-eating as a central theme in their narratives. In both books, cannibalism is reminiscent of other works such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1596), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1720) and James Malcolm Rymer's *The String of Pearls: A Romance* (1846-47), in which the theme is used as a vehicle for expressing ideas such as imperialism, colonialism and consumerism. Dickens's

⁶⁷ Sensational is the key. There are other periods in Dickens's life that we know little of and could lend themselves to successful fictionalisation. According to Claire Tomalin (2011), the period when Dickens was employed as an office clerk in Gray's Inn is 'the least documented time in his life' (35). If the subject matter is not sensational or melodramatic enough it does not, perhaps, inspire sufficient interest.

sexual and sometimes sadistic cannibalism is used in *The Girl in the Blue Dress* to discuss gender inequality and the place of women within Victorian society. In *Wanting*, Dickens, along with Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin, are cast as cannibals to explore racial and colonial exploitation and the hypocrisy of the imperial project.

The fictional Dickens in *Wanting* and *A Girl in a Blue Dress* is the representation of nineteenth-century misogyny and racism, but Arnold and Flanagan also present a more sympathetic version of the Victorian author. Undoubtedly, this is part of the novelist's job of creating a well-rounded, multi-dimensional character. It is telling, though, that when the contemporary writers want to portray Dickens in more sympathetic terms they do so by showing him as a victim of cannibalism, whether this is by his family (economic cannibalism) or by the public at large (crowds feeding on Dickens's words and narratives – a form of emotional and affective cannibalism). This portrayal can be interpreted as a psychoanalytic reflection of the cannibalistic nature of the writers' own treatment of Dickens and of the neo-Victorian genre's incorporation of the Victorian past. In this self-reflexive comment, it is not only the act of cannibalism which is revealing, but also who the eaters are: the family, the fans. Like the cannibalistic crowds in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Arnold and Flanagan are fans feeding off the famous author. The perspective can be extended if we see the entire neo-Victorian genre as a kind of fan-fiction feeding off the body of the Victorian. But in Arnold's and Flanagan's cannibalism we see something more fundamental than fans using a favourite author as a character – we can also see their desire to commune with the Victorian author and become part of his literary 'family'. In *Wanting*, Flanagan reveals his desire for communion by reminding us of the importance of the Victorian author. In *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Arnold's wish appears most obviously through Dodo. When the fictional Dickens asks her to finish his novel, she has become a stand-in for Arnold – the author herself is expressing a desire to become Dickens's literary descendent.

As we have seen, the desire to commune with the Victorian author is admixed with a need to create a new identity. To forward their own revisionist, reparative and redemptive discussions of history, both Arnold and Flanagan revise Dickens's biography (and in the case of Flanagan that of the Franklins' and Mathinna's as well), portraying him as a cannibal. In *Postmortem Postmodernists: the Afterlife of the Author in Recent Narrative* (2009), Laura E. Savu comments

that past authors 'are brought back to life, reanimated and bodied forth in new textual bodies' (21). I see a similar process at work in the novels discussed in this chapter; Arnold and Flanagan have brought Dickens back in new textual bodies, but only after feeding on and digesting his image to serve their own ends. Thus the Dickens they portray is both recognisable as the nineteenth-century man of letters, and has also become a character through which contemporary issues are discussed. Dickens's life is renewed and transformed to produce neo-Victorian novels infused with contemporary ideologies and which reinterpret personal and national histories. These are fictions that are undoubtedly of our times and could not be mistaken as Victorian, no matter how they are 'dressed' stylistically. *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting*, then, demonstrate how a Victorian literary influence is cannibalised, wrestled with, diminished and triumphed over, clearing imaginative space for the contemporary writers to create new fictional identities.

CHAPTER TWO

Stoker and Neo-*Draculas*

‘[E]very book a man, absolute flesh and blood!’ –Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1836)

‘The censor wrote Stoker he had devoted a day “to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the very remarkable dramatic version of your forthcoming novel”’ –Barbara Belford (1996)

This chapter discusses a group of recent novels that simultaneously cannibalise both Bram Stoker’s biography and his canonical Gothic novel, *Dracula* (1897), which itself centres on vampiric cannibalism. The contemporary reworkings of *Dracula* discussed here, which include Tom Holland’s *Supping with Panthers* (1996), Leslie S. Klinger’s *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008) and Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt’s *Dracula the Un-Dead* (2009), appropriate Stoker himself in a refracted version of the vampire story and envision new sources for the original novel (that is, other than the Victorian novelist’s own imagination and research), thereby challenging Stoker’s authorial status. This dual postmodernist cannibalism of the text and the author raises questions about authenticity, authorship, originality and literary influence. It also complicates my theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism by adding an additional level of incorporation to the form demonstrated in Chapter One. In their search for communion with Stoker and identity formation, the neo-Victorian writers discussed here cannibalise both a celebrated Victorian author *and* his most famous creation.

I. Cannibalistic *Dracula*

In their attempt to lend strength to their own work by incorporating the strongest elements of the nineteenth century, contemporary writers not only cannibalise canonical Victorian authors and celebrities, they also often appropriate, revise and complete canonical texts. To name two examples, Jean Rhys revisits Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Peter Carey returns to Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* in *Jack Maggs* (1997). According to Roland Barthes (1977), ‘the Author is thought to *nourish* the book’ (145, emphasis original); in other words, the writer inadvertently feeds himself into every text. Similarly, Jean Starobinski believes that a work ‘consumes’ the ‘past life and private history of its author’ (qtd. in Simion, 1996:76). Thus, when a contemporary writer incorporates an existing text, the act can be seen as both textual and authorial cannibalism. This double cannibalism is even more aggressive if the original author’s biography is incorporated into adaptations of his own work. This chapter probes this phenomenon through a reading of three contemporary reworkings of Bram Stoker’s classic Gothic novel *Dracula*.

Dracula is an ideal text for a discussion of literary cannibalism. The book’s eponymous character, a vampire, can be seen as a type of cannibal who feasts on the blood of the living.

The link between vampirism and cannibalism has been noted by critics such as Deborah Root (1996), who writes that ‘In the European tradition the figure of the vampire can be thought of as a variant of the *wétiko* cannibal monster’ (12). H.L. Malchow (1996) even claims that ‘The savage cannibal and the gothic vampire, a species of the cannibal, have much in common. [...] Together they share a kind of unholy communion, taking the body and blood’ and that ‘the vampire appropriates the vitality, the life-blood, of his victim, just as the cannibal wishes [...] to absorb the physical strength and courage of the enemy upon whose body he feasted’ (124). Since the release of *Dracula*, critics have also seen the eponymous character himself in explicitly cannibalistic terms. One of the first reviewers, for instance, singled out ‘blood-sucking’ and ‘human-flesh-devouring’ as elements of the book.¹ In more recent interpretations of the novel, critics continue to conflate vampirism with man-eating. Patrick Brantlinger (1988), for example, describes Dracula’s preying habits as ‘blood-sucking cannibalism’ (233-34). Beyond the vampires in the novel, the theme of cannibalism is also present in the character R.M. Renfield, who consumes live creatures such as flies, spiders and birds. This eating practice is diagnosed by the doctor John Seward as ‘zoophagy’, a form of consumption very close to cannibalism. For example, in the essay ‘Vampires in the Light’, Nina Auerbach (1997[1995]) contends that ‘Renfield is usually a bridge from supernatural to clinical cannibalism’ (400). Malchow similarly writes that Renfield ‘had abandoned the metaphoric blood sacrifice of the Protestant service for a more ancient, cannibalistic superstition’ (162). What is particularly telling in some of these interpretations is how the critics, instead of distancing themselves from the language of cannibalism, end up adopting it in their analysis of Stoker’s book and characters, a process which can also be seen as cannibalistic.

Dracula and the Gothic generally, like the vampire characters in the text, also have vampiric and cannibalistic qualities. Using Derrida’s interpretation of ‘genre’, *Dracula* ‘participates’ prominently in the Gothic. Peter J. Kitson (2002) considers *Dracula*, along with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), ‘probably three high points’ of the Victorian Gothic (163). According to Maggie Kilgour (1995), the Gothic genre is cannibalistic, as it ‘feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which it never fully disentangles itself’ and that ‘it is, at its best, a highly wrought, artificial form which is

¹ *The Daily News*, qtd. in *The Academy*, 52:1317 (1897:July 31), p. 98.

extremely self-conscious of its artificiality and creation out of old material and traditions' (4). In its generic complexity and plurality, the neo-Victorian genre is similar to the Gothic as described by Kilgour and is thus also cannibalistic. Christian Gutleben (2001) writes that 'from a formal point of view, retro-Victorian fiction carries the traces of evolution of the fictional modes and genres. [...] What is striking is that these various generic layers are superimposed within the neo-Victorian novels considered individually, so that each work appears like a coalescence of its literary past' (215).

Not only is the neo-Victorian similar to the Gothic in terms of its admixture of styles and other genres, but also in its overall sense of the phantomatic. The neo-Victorian genre as a whole is haunted by the past, which is especially manifested in the overt use of tropes such as ghosts and hauntings.² Although the Gothic is commonly considered to have originated in the mid-eighteenth century, 'in the popular imagination the Victorian is in many ways *the* Gothic period' (Warwick, 2007:29 emphasis original). As such, the Gothic and the neo-Victorian are in tune with the postmodern idea of *différance*, but in reverse order. One notion of *différance* is that the meanings of words and signs are constantly postponed or diverted, so that they can only be understood through an additional chain of signifiers. Both the Gothic and the neo-Victorian return to earlier literary forms to foster meaning and, as a result, a small chain of regressive signifiers is involved. Catherine Spooner (2006) believes that Gothic texts deal with, among other themes, 'the legacies of the past and its burdens on the present' (8). As such, the Gothic and the neo-Victorian share thematic affinities, as coming to terms with the Victorian past through modern ideologies is an important aspect of neo-Victorian fiction. Both genres also epitomise the idea of 'belatedness'. Everything is 'belated' in the schema of neo-Victorian fiction as the novels address the Victorian era from the present. The Gothic, too, is a 'belated' form, both from the perspective of the present day and the Victorian era. This sense of belatedness is evident in the names of the two genres: there is an odd similarity between the terms 'Gothic novel' and 'neo-Victorian novel'. According to Ian Watt (1986), 'It is hardly too much to say that etymologically the term "Gothic Novel" is an oxymoron for "Old New"' (158). Likewise, 'neo-Victorian novel' can be considered as 'New-Old New': 'neo' and 'novel' both mean 'new' and they bracket 'Victorian', an adjective referring to a period in the historical past, which can thus be regarded as a synonym for old. Seen this way,

² See, for example, *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2009).

neo-Victorian novel ('New-Old New') can be considered as an update of 'Gothic novel' ('Old New').

Dracula can be considered cannibalistic in other ways. Its epistolary structure, incorporating a range of documents including journals, letters, telegrams, memoranda and newspaper clippings, constitutes the patch-worked 'body' of the text. In the novel, these different documents are put together by the 'textual vampire' (Cordell, 2009:442), Mina Harker, into a text that the band of vampire-hunters use to decipher the Count's movements.³ Moreover, *Dracula* has even cannibalised its author. Biographies of Stoker such as Harry Ludlam's *A Biography of Dracula: The Life Story of Bram Stoker* (1962), Daniel Farson's *The Man Who Wrote Dracula: A Biography of Bram Stoker* (1975),⁴ Barbara Belford's *Bram Stoker: A Biography of the Author of Dracula* (1996) and Paul Murray's *From the Shadow of Dracula: A Life of Bram Stoker* (2004) point to the fact that Stoker is often identified with the fictional Count and rendered as a component of the *Dracula* mythos.⁵ *The Times Literary Supplement* wrote in 1966 that Stoker was 'apparently lost in his creation' (qtd. in Farson 1975:172).

More significantly, since its publication, Stoker's novel has been transformed and adapted into numerous different forms of cultural commodities, including stage performances, musicals, fan fiction, ballet, films, TV adaptations, graphic novels, comics, dolls, websites, video games and, more recently, an iPad edition – 'Dracula: The Official Stoker Family Edition' (2011). It is not surprising, then, that the Victorian text should also find another lease on life in neo-Victorian fiction.⁶ *Dracula* continues to live by consuming and sucking in the blood of up-to-date cultural expressions. The text which gives us the most famous supernatural and immortal Victorian fictional character is constantly reinvented in popular culture, perpetuating its un-dead quality. In the novel, Jonathan Harker's understanding of the Count provides an unsettlingly prophetic vision: 'This was the being I was helping to transfer

³ See Jennifer Wicke's 'Vampire Typewriting: *Dracula* and its Media' (1992).

⁴ Daniel Farson is Bram Stoker's grand-nephew.

⁵ Paul Murray wrote in 2004, 'it is surely time to make the effort to understand Bram Stoker, the man who created and, to a large extent, *was* Dracula' (3, emphasis original). Although Murray claims that he is attempting to understand the author, this conflation of Stoker with Dracula continues to sideline Stoker's own subjectivity.

⁶ In order to offer sufficient space to neo-Victorian novels that cannibalise a Victorian text, this chapter focuses on textual appropriations of *Dracula* and, regrettably, filmic and other forms of representation are not considered. For a discussion of the cinematic reincarnations of *Dracula*, see Roland R. Thomas's 'Dracula and the Cinematic Afterlife of the Victorian Novel' in John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff's edited volume *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000).

to London where, perhaps for centuries to come, he might, amongst its millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless' (Ch. 4, 44-45). If in this quote we replace Dracula the character (the 'being') with *Dracula* the text, we have a description of the work's place and mechanics in popular culture. Is it not true that more than one century after the book's publication, there are now, if not 'teeming millions', a sizeable number of pseudo-*Draculas*, and that this circle is 'ever widening'? From one text a large number of similar texts are derived, each bearing at least some resemblance to the original, feeding the hungry reading public.

To say that *Dracula* is vampiric may undermine the authority and autonomy of contemporary writers and artists. By being 'vamped', they are conveniently characterised as passive agents, not active participants in cultural production. Instead of involuntarily submitting to the power of Stoker's text, I believe contemporary writers consciously invoke and consume *Dracula* in their own work. As Ken Gelder (1994) has it, 'To read this novel is to consume the object itself' (65). Malchow's description of vampirism, 'the vampire appropriates the vitality, the life-blood, of his victim', can be applied to neo-Victorian writers in general who feed on the essence and 'life-blood' of their famous literary predecessors for sustenance. As Nina Auerbach notes, in typically culinary terms, 'Stoker made vampires palatable in the 1890s' (1995:159). Vampires are still palatable *now*; the demand for one specific vampire – Stoker's – is particularly insatiable.

II. Neo-Victorian double cannibalism: textual and biographical

Contemporary works consume *Dracula* in a number of ways and demonstrate the different manners in and extents to which Stoker's text is cannibalised: a character is lifted from the original work and appropriated in new texts; the original is incorporated as a prequel and given new narrative origins, or the entire work is subsumed, swallowed whole. Many texts cannibalise Stoker's original title as well, demonstrating their eagerness to be associated with the famous Victorian novel,⁷ which according to John Sutherland (2008) is one of the two 'richest franchises in fiction' (117).⁸ A nineteenth-century reviewer's remark that '*Dracula* is

⁷ Examples include Raymond Rudorff's *The Dracula Archives* (1971), Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape* (1975), Simon Hawke's *The Dracula Caper* (1988), Marie Kiraly's *Mina: the Dracula Story Continues* (1996), James Reese's *The Dracula Dossier* (2008) and Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* series (1992-).

⁸ The other, for Sutherland, is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

not likely to leave room for imitators’⁹ has been comprehensively disproved by the book’s afterlife and the fact that ‘there is always more to be said about *Dracula*, always room for further interpretation and elaboration’ (Gelder, 1994:65).

In this chapter, my focus shifts to neo-Victorian novels that provide ‘further interpretation and elaboration’ of *Dracula* by simultaneously cannibalising the text and the author’s biography.¹⁰ This simultaneous cannibalism suggests there is very little straightforward biofiction to employ Stoker as a subject, as opposed to fecund biography in Dickens and James.¹¹ Stoker is often only used as a character in the neo-gothic romance being told. Although the texts discussed employ him, they do not really aim at revisiting or enhancing the understanding of his life story. Some prominent details from his biography may be incorporated – his marriage to Florence Balcombe, his friendship with Hall Caine (the dedicatee of *Dracula*: ‘My Dear Friend Hommy Beg’; ‘Hommy Beg’ being Caine’s childhood nickname), his admiration for the American poet Walt Whitman, his interest in Egyptology, his sexuality, his acquaintance with the Wilde family – but only as token authenticating details which form the backdrop for the exploration of his writing of *Dracula*.

Fittingly for a writer overshadowed by his most successful literary creation, Stoker’s most significant biographical detail is that he wrote *Dracula*. Some people may be aware that he was manager of Henry Irving’s Lyceum Theatre in London, a position he held for seventeen years between 1878 and Irving’s death in 1905.¹² Fewer recall that he wrote a corpus of creative work including a collection of children’s stories *Under the Sunset* (1881), the novels *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), *The Lady of the Shroud* (1909) and *The Lair of the White*

⁹ *The Chronicle*, qtd. in *The Academy*, 52:1317 (1897:July 31), p. 98.

¹⁰ In *Bram Stoker’s Dracula: A Reader’s Guide* (2009), William Hughes describes three types of contemporary fictions inspired by *Dracula*: ‘First there is a significant body of works that adopts or adapts Stoker’s vampire (and, on occasions, other characters from *Dracula*) into narratives that prefigure, parallel or post-date the events of the novel. [...] Second, there is a more substantial – more withal, often more subtle – range of fictions that pay effective homage to *Dracula* either by referencing the novel or its cinematic adaptations, or by making free – and sometimes ironic – use of the vampire conventions established by these. These two categories are bridged by a third form of *Dracula*-inflected fiction, in which Stoker himself makes an appearance either as a historical character or, on occasions, as a fictionalised vampire hunter or expert on occult matters’ (120).

My focus in this chapter is on the third category outlined by Hughes, although in the works I consider Stoker is neither a vampire hunter nor an expert on occult matters.

¹¹ Chapter One shows that Charles Dickens’s biography is used in neo-Victorian fiction. Henry James’s life story is also subjected to similar treatment. See Colm Tóibín’s *The Master* and David Lodge’s *Author, Author*, both published in 2004.

¹² Indeed, the obituary of Stoker, ‘buried’ in page 15 of *The Times*, was ‘largely dedicated to the man’s faithful service to the great actor Irving’ and it singled out *Reminiscences of Irving* as his ‘chief literary memorial’ (Luckhurst, 2012). Even in death Stoker is overshadowed by his friend and employer.

Worm (1911) as well as non-fiction such as *The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland* (1879) and *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (1906).¹³ Although in recent years critics have begun to pay attention to other works by Stoker, they are unlikely to supersede *Dracula* in popularity. They will not, for David Punter and Glennis Byron (2004), come close to ‘achieving the power of his most famous novel’ (167). Their comment, made in the early twenty-first century, is consistent with general opinion. Leonard Wolf, for example, remarked rather condescendingly in 1993, ‘It is enough that the world was lucky; that something gathered in Bram Stoker that made it possible for him to make one—and only one—work whose central figure could become an overwhelming symbol of the crimes and temptations of the twentieth century’ (xxiii). While some neo-Victorian biofiction centres on the intimate or sensational aspects of Victorian personae’s lives, in the case of Stoker, it is his writing of *Dracula* and the contexts surrounding its composition that are particularly captivating for contemporary writers to revision. In appropriating Stoker’s biography, some writers also choose to emphasise his involvement with theatre, often as a means of undermining his literary accomplishments. Still, the argument made in Chapter One – that contemporary novelists feed upon the most savoury aspects of a Victorian author’s life to develop their own fiction – also applies to the reworkings of *Dracula*.

Cora Kaplan (2007) believes that including the original Victorian author as a character in a contemporary adaptation is a ‘predictable postmodern turn, widely deployed in Victoriana’ (155). Her example is Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs*, which appropriates *Great Expectations* and its author Charles Dickens (‘Tobias Oats’ in the novel) as a character. I consider this a ‘dual cannibalism’, by which I mean a contemporary novel’s incorporation of both a Victorian text and its author’s biography. Emma Tennant has written two works which also provide examples of this dual cannibalism. Her *Tess* (1993) both revisits Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) and describes the Victorian poet’s actions and thoughts, while *Felony* (2002) retells the source story of *The Aspern Papers* (1888) and appropriates Henry James’s

¹³ Books by Bram Stoker, in chronological order, are *The Duties of Clerks of Petty sessions in Ireland* (1879), *Under the Sunset* (1881), *A Glimpse of America* (1886), *The Snake’s Pass* (1890), *The Watter’s Mou’* (1895), *The Shoulder of Shasta* (1895), *Dracula* (1897), *Miss Betty* (1898), *The Mystery of the Sea* (1902), *The Jewel of the Seven Stars* (1903), *The Man* (1905), *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (1906), *Lady Athlyne* (1908), *Snowbound: The Record of a Theatrical Touring Party* (1908), *The Lady of the Shroud* (1909), *Famous Impostors* (1910), *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911) and *Dracula’s Guest – And Other Weird Stories* (1914). Today, these are often forgotten, so much so that Frederick R. Karl could still write in 2000 that *Dracula* is ‘the only one of Stoker’s fictions to be remembered’ (206).

biography.¹⁴ In the previous chapter, I discussed how contemporary writers use a famous Victorian's life not only to comment on it but to engage broader issues such as gender, sexuality, race and empire. A different agenda emerges when a writer and one of his or her texts are incorporated simultaneously. Thus, *Jack Maggs*, *Tess* and *Felony* do not provide a critique on the authors or the texts alone but demand reconsiderations of the unique circumstances under which the originals were written: in *Jack Maggs*, Carey's Dickens is sinister and exploitative (Kaplan, 2007:155); Tennant's representation of Hardy in *Tess* is 'belittling', 'biased and unjustified' (Gutleben, 2001:55, 92); on Tennant's portrayal of James, a reviewer surmises that she 'could simply be accusing Henry James of murder' (Litt, 2002). The neo-Victorian *Draculas* discussed in this chapter fit this propensity for Victorian authors to be treated negatively in an adaptation of their work.

The majority of contemporary responses to *Dracula* focus on the nineteenth-century novel's fictional characters. This is reminiscent of the kind of eighteenth-century reading practices capaciously termed 'imaginative expansion' discussed in David A. Brewer's *Afterlife of Characters: 1726-1825* (2005). For Brewer, readers treated characters in popular texts as if they were 'both fundamentally incomplete and the common property of all' (2). These readers liberally invented for the fictional beings 'additional details and often entirely new adventures' (ibid.) and the originary authors in these cases were rendered largely 'irrelevant figures to be effaced' (189). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors such as Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne and Walter Scott had to negotiate and safeguard their authorial power when confronted with readers' imaginative expansion, which they both relied on for the sake of their works' social canonicity and, understandably, dreaded. Neo-Victorian novels which develop afterlives or alternate lives for well-known fictional characters are thus a contemporary continuation of long-existing reading practices. In this chapter I discuss adaptations of *Dracula* that also include Stoker as a character. At first sight, this approach seems to work towards remedying the neglect of Stoker in the afterlives of his own novel – restore the author to the text, so to speak. Far from unproblematically acknowledging and rehabilitating the Victorian author's role in the creation of *Dracula*, however, the contemporary writers incorporate Stoker only to challenge his 'originary' position.

¹⁴ *The Aspern Papers* provides an example of Victorian cannibalism of the past, as Henry James cannibalises the story of Claire Clairmont (Mary Godwin's half-sister and Lord Byron's one-time lover) and her Romantic contemporaries.

Brewer argues that after 1825, ‘the year in which Sir Walter Scott’s *Tales of the Crusaders* first appeared’ (189), readers continued to engage in imaginative expansion but their attitudes towards the writers underwent a significant change. Readers began to demonstrate a higher level of regard for the originary authors, who were ‘represented as the font of authority regarding those characters, including their lives off-page’ (189). The result was that readers’ predilection for imagining fictional characters’ alternate afterlives became less and less common and acceptable, so much so that ‘nonauthorial imaginative expansion should now seem so eccentric and marginal’ (190). If, as Brewer suggests, it was in the nineteenth century that ‘prominence and authority [were] accorded to originary authors’ (189), it is unsurprising that this form of reverence for authorial authority is questioned, challenged and even subverted in neo-Victorian fiction. After all, neo-Victorianism is saturated by a desire to destabilise nineteenth-century power patterns and social norms, despite sometimes concurrently endorsing them. Contemporary writers’ reaction to Victorian originary authors is perhaps motivated by an Oedipal pleasure, as Barthes (1975) has it, ‘to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end’ (10). Instead of denuding, knowing and learning the origin of their works, however, neo-Victorian authors usurp and cannibalise it. Challenging a literary ancestor’s originality can be viewed as a common postmodern ploy as well: the Romantic notion of the artist as ‘inspired originator’, Paul Maltby believes, is ‘rejected by postmodern conceptions of the artist and artistic practice’ and ‘the artist comes to be seen not as a visionary or a genius, but as an illusionist or wirepuller’ (qtd. in Savu, 2009:108).

Semantically speaking, Brewer’s ‘originary author’ is a curiously redundant expression. The ability to originate constitutes an intrinsic part of any author’s role: he or she ‘originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, a father, or ancestor’ (Said, 1975:83). A marker and modifier, Brewer’s ‘originary’ underscores the difference between those writers who originate a work and those who do not. It is exactly this ‘originariness’, the originality of the Victorian authors, which is their ‘life-blood’, the reason contemporary writers contest and cannibalise their fiction. As we will see in the neo-*Dracula* texts, neo-Victorians work to undermine the authorial power of the originary Stoker.

Of course, Stoker did not create the prototypical vampire. Even in the nineteenth century, before the publication of *Dracula*, a number of fictions featured vampires, such as ‘The Vampyre’ (1819) by John Polidori, *Varney the Vampyre, or, The Feast of Blood* (1845-1847)

by James Malcolm Rymer (also attributed to Thomas Preskett Prest) and *Carmilla* (1872) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Given ‘his *appetite* for researching the vampire legend’ (Malchow, 1996:143 emphasis added) and the vast quantity of source material he used in the novel, including folklore and Transylvania history, Stoker himself practised a form of textual cannibalism. Still, his *Dracula* is now commonly considered the defining vampire and the Count is even often incorrectly lauded fiction’s first. By challenging Stoker’s authorial power, the contemporary writers simultaneously undermine Victorian reverence for originary authors and betray their own cannibalisation of Stoker’s authorial position. This is the crux of the anxiety of influence in the *Dracula* adaptations. Well aware that they are belated, neo-Victorian writers attempt to usurp their begetter, father, or ancestor, just like the kinsmen in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*. The contemporary writers cannibalise their literary ancestor to incorporate his strength and to be identified with him. The fundamental ambivalence occurs in that a desire to denigrate the Victorian notion of the originary author is subsumed by a stronger desire to *replace* and then *become* him.

Contemporary writers challenge Stoker’s originary role either through reimagining what might have inspired him to write *Dracula*¹⁵ or by portraying him as co-editor or even plagiarist. In these acts, the writers are in some sense metaphorically destroying the subject on which they build their fictions. Stoker is usurped of his authorial significance and his ‘life-blood’ is at risk. As motioned at the beginning of this chapter, a creative work is ‘nourished’ by its author and contains his life and history, in other words, his life-blood. For John Milton, in his pamphlet *Areopagitica* (1644) a ‘good book’ is ‘the precious life-blood of a master spirit’ (34). Similarly, Holbrook Jackson (1950 [1930]) believes that a real book contains ‘the juice or essence’ of the man who wrote it (331); that is to say, an author’s life-blood, source, elixir or substance may be found in the body of his or her work.

¹⁵ On the inspiration for *Dracula*, Harry Ludlam (1962) recounts an anecdote from Stoker’s son, Noel Stoker: ‘Noel told me that in a flippant mood his father attributed the genesis of *Dracula* to a nightmare he had after a surfeit of dressed crab at supper one night. It was a private family joke’ (27). It is also widely and incorrectly believed that Stoker based Count Dracula on his historical namesake, Vlad Dracula of Wallachia (1431–1476). According to Daniel Farson (1975), ‘Even a cursory assessment will show that Stoker seized on the name of Dracula, together with a vague impression of the background, and that was all’ (130). Barbara Belford (1997[1996]) notes: ‘Clearly no one event, conversation, or personal frustration motivated *Dracula*. The novel’s genesis was a process, which involved Stoker’s education and interests, his fears and fantasies, as well as those of his Victorian colleagues’ (255-256). That said, Belford also believes that ‘Unravelling *Dracula*’s origins will continue as long as the novel endures’ (260).

As a vampire story, blood is a prominent presence and its contamination a major concern in *Dracula*. As William Hughes (2006) remarks, ‘Blood in Stoker’s novel is visualised; blood in the book’s criticism is signified’ (qtd. in Bak, 2007:xi). In my analysis of *Dracula* and its contemporary adaptations, I see blood as a signification of Stoker’s originary power. Neo-Victorian writers are akin to vampires who drain Stoker of his authorial vitality and suck their literary ancestor’s life-blood to maintain their own existence. Through this vampirism the neo-Victorian writers also acquire blood kinship with the nineteenth-century author: his life-blood flows in their books. The comparison between those who benefit from a writer’s work to vampires is habitually explicit, as in ‘The American Authors in England’ in New York’s *The Evening Post* (July 18, 1885): ‘And shall the work which has drained its author’s life-blood be the prey of the first vampire that chooses to flap his penny-edition wings over his unprotected and hapless victim?’

Through their postmodernist dual cannibalism of text and author, neo-Victorian novels raise questions of authenticity, authorship, originality and anxiety of influence. In the following sections, I will discuss the possible causes for Stoker’s vulnerable authorial position, which makes his book – his life-blood – susceptible to literary vampirism. I will then look at three neo-Victorian texts which return to both *Dracula* and Stoker’s biography. Tom Holland’s *Supping with Panthers* (1996) reimagines Stoker’s inspiration for writing his vampire story. In their fascination with and fictionalisation of the origins of a nineteenth-century work, neo-Victorian novelists demonstrate an anxiety about their literary ancestor’s creative achievements and a desire to diminish this power. Holland is obviously using Stoker’s novel as a primary intertext and imagines that Stoker, too, relies on external sources for inspiration instead of inventing *Dracula* from scratch, thereby displacing the Victorian author as a single point of aesthetic and authentic origin and suggesting that he is guilty of the same form of textual cannibalism in which Holland himself is engaged. Then I will discuss Leslie S. Klinger’s *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008), which can be seen as cannibalising the text of *Dracula* in its entirety. Klinger’s occasional use of fictionalised notes, moreover, transgresses the etiquette of normal annotation. In his notes, he constructs a theory about the origin of *Dracula* that demotes Stoker from the text’s sole author to its editor. His annotations, apart from forming a tantalising narrative of their own, may also be viewed as a revival of the reading practice of glossing common among readers in the Middle Ages. Lastly, I turn my focus to *Dracula the Un-Dead* (2009), which has a formidable provenance as the ‘official’

sequel to the original novel endorsed by the Stoker Estate, and co-written by historian Ian Holt and Stoker's great-grandnephew Dacre Stoker. The fact that one of the co-writers is a blood-descendent of the Victorian author makes *Dracula the Un-Dead* profoundly useful to a discussion of issues relating to cultural (and familial) capital, textual vampirism, and anxiety of influence. Most unexpectedly, Stoker is made a plagiarist in *Dracula the Un-Dead*, raising questions about the authors' sincerity and psychology in their ostensible reverence to the Victorian author.

III. Stoker's authorial vulnerability

In the three neo-*Dracula* texts under scrutiny, 'Stoker' is strongly associated with the theatre and his identity as a writer is, to varying degrees, disregarded and marginalised. That the connection between Stoker and the theatre takes centre stage in the *Dracula* adaptations reflects how contemporary writers manipulate the Victorian's biography to serve their own purposes. They present Stoker first and foremost as the manager of Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre.¹⁶ True, according to Elizabeth Miller and Dacre Stoker (2012), 'In his own lifetime Bram Stoker was far better known as Irving's manger than as an author (even of *Dracula*)' (217-218). Indeed, there is a strong connection between *Dracula* and the theatre, as David J. Skal (1997) notes, 'our modern image of the king of vampires is largely a creation of the legitimate theatre' (371). Miller and Dacre Stoker even go so far as to suggest that 'Without the theatre – and Bram's intimate connections with it – the novel *Dracula* as we know it would never have been written' (220). Still, the neo-Victorian writers' overwhelming focus on Stoker's theatrical work (however significant and successful it may have been) instead of his writing career is not entirely motivated by a desire for accurate biographical representation but a certain amount of self-interest. Since these writers consciously model their fictional works on Stoker's vampire novel it is safe to assume a certain foreknowledge of his creative endeavours, and yet they have chosen to emphasise another area of his life to such an extent that his authorial status is subtly compromised. This form of representation helps to promote their overall agenda of usurping Stoker's originary role in the creation of *Dracula*. Stoker's close affinity with the theatrical world may also serve to suggest his impersonation of an author, considering that Victorian theatre is often considered to embody elements of inauthenticity and immorality.

¹⁶ Stoker's own *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* provides an invaluable account of his time as the theatre manager of Lyceum.

This vision of Stoker is particularly interesting if one compares it to the treatment of Dickens and James in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* and Emma Tennant's *Felony* respectively. In Carey's and Tennant's novels, which appropriate the Victorians' biographies and their fiction, Dickens's and James's identity as writers forms an essential part of the narratives. In fact, it is exactly their ethics and morality as authors that Carey and Tennant examine. By contrast, the writers of the neo-Victorian *Draculas* deliberately neglect and even mock Stoker's literary aspirations as part of their strategy to drain him of his authorial power.

Why is Stoker's authorial status not as protected as that of other Victorian authors? And why in particular is his position as the author of *Dracula* so vulnerable? Even in his own lifetime, a reviewer questioned his authorship of the novel: 'It is almost inconceivable that Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula*. Still, he must have done it. There is his name on the title page... [I]t is hard enough to imagine Bram Stoker a business man, to say nothing of his possessing an imagination capable of projecting Dracula upon paper' (*Detroit Free Press*, 18 November 1899). Such incredulity has never completely faded. That Stoker was not from a literary family and that he only wrote one universally known text may, for subsequently generations, have rendered his authorship of *Dracula* an incongruous aspect of his life.¹⁷ His authorial position and the authenticity of his work may also have suffered from the novel's numerous editions, mutations and adaptations – most now do not encounter their first *Dracula* through Stoker. Paul Murray (2004), for example, believes that 'the widespread awareness of *Dracula* derives more from movies than from reading the novel' (165). Stoker may even, to a certain extent, have undermined his own ordinary role by adopting the 'editor' framing device for the novel, most notably in the opening:

How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them.

Although this short passage is unsigned and the passive voice stresses impersonality ('these papers have been placed', 'all needless matters have been eliminated'), one is led to believe

¹⁷ It is interesting to compare the reception of Stoker's *Dracula* with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Although each author is now famous primarily for one Gothic novel, Shelley's authorial status seems much more respected than Stoker's, perhaps due to the fact that she comes from 'a network of familial writing influences' (Spencer, 2005:119) and the feminist discussion that arises inherently from her authorship.

these are Stoker's words. Reviewers in the nineteenth century commonly compared Stoker's use of multiple narrators in *Dracula* to his contemporary Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60). For example, one *Spectator* reviewer believed that Stoker 'closely followed' Collins's narrative method of using various letters and diaries. Stoker's pretence as editor can also be traced back to the tradition of the found manuscript trope from the earliest Gothic fiction such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764),¹⁸ as well as Walter Scott's historical novels. By including the editor's disclaimer before a myriad of texts purportedly written by the characters, Stoker situates himself as merely an organiser of the documents and as a result, 'the text provides no omniscient voice' (Miller and Stoker, 2012:55) and more importantly, 'no single *authorial voice*' (Gelder, 1994:71 emphasis added). Thus, Stoker might have inadvertently compromised his authorial control over the text by adopting the epistolary frame. In neo-Victorian works such as Leslie S Klinger's *The New Annotated Dracula* in which Stoker is represented as an editor, then, the contemporary writers are extending the Victorian author's own ploy beyond its intended boundaries.

Stoker's authorship of and authority over *Dracula* is also challenged by the many inconsistencies, misquotations and factual errors in the book. A look at Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal's annotated edition of the text finds the editors' scholarly efforts in no small way devoted to meticulously highlighting mistakes, which they interpret primarily in two ways: characters' lapses or Stoker's.¹⁹ Both interpretations have different interpretations for Stoker's authorial position. If the mistakes are the characters', there are two possible ways to consider them: either Stoker intentionally bestows them on his creations or he is merely 'editing' their documents (following his own conceit) and therefore he is not culpable. If, however, the mistakes are Stoker's, then his authority is obviously undermined.

In some of their notes, Auerbach and Skal attribute the mistakes in *Dracula* to the characters. For example, 'In describing Van Helsing, Seward misquotes *Othello* 5.2.298-300' (106), 'Van Helsing's absurd version of Luke 9.62 [...] Van Helsing turns Jesus's condemnation into a heroic exhortation' (193), 'Does Mina forget that she has seen Dracula in Hyde Park,

¹⁸ In the preface to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (1766[1764]), Horace Walpole assumed 'the borrowed personage of a translator' (xiii) and claimed that the work was originally 'found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England' and that '[i]t was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529' (v).

¹⁹ Likewise, Leonard Wolf, editor of *The Essential Dracula: The Definitive Annotated Edition of Bram Stoker's Classic Novel* (1975), also consistently points out errors and inconsistencies. Unlike Auerbach and Skal, Wolf disregards Stoker's editor conceit altogether.

or has he changed radically since then?’ (251) and ‘Keen, animated (French). Van Helsing incorrectly uses the masculine form of the word’ (314). In these cases and others, the mistakes can perhaps be interpreted as Stoker’s attempt to imbue his characters with certain flaws: Seward is no Shakespearean scholar, Mina can be forgetful sometimes and Van Helsing’s knowledge of the Bible and French is somewhat dubious. In a similar vein, Carol A. Senf (2002) contends that the characters’ ‘frequent discrepancies between their professed beliefs and their actions’ are Stoker’s ‘clues’ to expose their ‘failures in judgement or lack of self-knowledge’ (422). That is to say, Senf positively interprets apparent inconsistencies in the narrative as Stoker’s subtle and purposeful characterisation.

Even though the narrative technique would provide Stoker with ample allowance for error, the suggestion that all the mistakes are deliberate does not hold. Auerbach and Skal’s notes do not identify the characters as engineers of their every lapse. As the examples quoted in the previous paragraph show, the editors do sometimes subscribe to Stoker’s framing and the theory that the characters are responsible for the misquotations and discrepancies. At other times, they are evasive about who to blame. When Harker quotes *Hamlet* incorrectly in his shorthand diary, instead of saying ‘Harker misquotes *Hamlet* 1.1. 107-08’ (compare this to Seward’s misquotation, above), they note simply ‘Misquotation *Hamlet* 1.1.107-08’ (41), avoiding the obligation to name a culpable party. On another occasion, Auerbach and Skal simply suggest that the text is itself inconsistent: ‘*Dracula* gives contradictory histories of Lucy and Mina’s friendship’ (57). The book develops an autonomy in this way, isolated from both Stoker and its characters. The novel becomes its own being and Stoker’s responsibility for his creation is further undermined.

There are also instances when Auerbach and Skal are ambivalent about whether it is the author, the so-called ‘editor’ or the character who errs. For example, ‘Alaska and Hawaii. Renfield, or Stoker, is prescient here: Alaska and Hawaii were admitted into the Union in the mid-twentieth century’ (215). In fact, it could also be Seward’s or Mina’s mistake, for it is recorded in the former’s phonograph diary and subsequently transcribed by the latter. This particular note by Auerbach and Skal demonstrates a moment of their editorial uncertainty as well as signalling the impossibility of sustaining the illusion that Stoker is merely an ‘editor’ of the documents. In another note, ‘Slight misquotation of *King Lear* 3.4.142. The Lyceum staged *King Lear* in 1892’ (238), which refers to Renfield’s speech and is included in

Seward's diary, the editors subtly suggest that it is Stoker, manager of the theatre, who misquotes *Lear*.

The notes quoted thus far show that Auerbach and Skal are somewhat confused in their attempt to reconcile the interpretations of Stoker as 'editor' and Stoker as 'author'. Considered together, however, their annotations give a strong impression that the misquotations and discrepancies in *Dracula* are Stoker's, not his characters'. Although in an early chapter Auerbach and Skal remark on 'an editorial lapse on Stoker's part' (33), many of their notes disregard the 'editor' conceit altogether and point directly to Stoker. For example, 'Stoker seems to slip here' (44), 'Another slip in Stoker's chronology' (139), 'By the logic of Stoker's own rules, it is unclear how Lucy could have been saved' (171), 'Stoker errs: in Catholic doctrine, an indulgence cannot be given for a future sin' (187) and 'There is some debate about the accuracy of Stoker's geography here' (306). The combined use of the editor framing device and polyphonic narrators does not exempt Stoker from being accountable for the numerous inaccuracies in the novel. Such carelessness puts his authorial status in a vulnerable position, as the errors provide contemporary writers an opportunity to take control over his text. For example, it is largely the inconsistencies and mistakes in *Dracula* that license Klinger to construct a 'gentle fiction' (xii) regarding the origin of the novel in *The New Annotated Dracula*, an origin that displaces Stoker's authorship. Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt's *Dracula the Un-Dead* also at least partially depends on Stoker's errors to put forward their theory about the true creator of the text. As a character in the novel says to the fictional Stoker: 'Your book is ripe with inconsistencies, false presumptions, and bad imagination' (205).

That *Dracula* has been viewed as a popular novel for much of its history has also had an effect on its afterlife and Stoker's authority. *Dracula*'s low-brow popularity, manifest for instance in its status as household name alongside Mickey Mouse and Tarzan (Farson, 1975:170) and in the commodities it inspires from dolls to cereals, has led to the trivialisation of the text, especially by scholars. Leonard Wolf wrote in 1975 that 'Bram Stoker's splendid fiction *Dracula* is not yet a thoroughly respectable literary work' (vii), as if it were not sophisticated or tasteful enough for serious study. Indeed, *Dracula* has only gained academic recognition and undergone canonisation in the past few decades. In 1972, Royce MacGillivray prophetically wrote that 'While the idea of scholarly study of a horror novel

may initially seem ridiculous, I think I can show that *Dracula* is substantial enough to deserve the attention of scholars' (qtd. in Farson, 1975:156-7). According to William Hughes and Andrew Smith (1998), 'The development in the 1960s of critical mechanisms, the intellectual basis of which were at odds with [a] restrictive, canonical view of literature facilitated the entry of *Dracula* into the field of critical study in the 1970s' (2). Not only is *Dracula* now much studied, it has also recently been canonised by being included in the Penguin English Library, a collection which defines the 'literary canon' (Kelly, 2012). Still, even though *Dracula* now attracts more critical attention than before, its huge cultural baggage continues to limit its respectability in certain circles.

Lastly, the ambiguous ending of *Dracula* tempts writers to take advantage of Stoker's creation and develop further stories for the Count. Unlike Arthur Conan Doyle who killed his most famous character Sherlock Holmes but then brought him to sate aggressive commercial demand (Doyle not entirely respected as originary author either), Stoker himself makes Dracula's continuing existence a possibility within the text. As Auerbach and Skal write regarding the ending: 'This is not the ritual communal killing the vampire hunters had planned. Dracula's supposed death is riddled with ambiguity' (325). Because Stoker had first written a more definitive demise for Dracula in his original manuscript (Auerbach and Sakl, 1997:325), the vampire's unconvincing 'death' in the published version is not another instance of Stoker's narrative inconsistency but the result of his intentional design.²⁰ Although there is no evidence that he planned to write a sequel to *Dracula*, that the vampire *could* still be alive facilitates many afterlives.

IV. Tom Holland's *Supping with Panthers* (1996)

The preface to Tom Holland's *Supping with Panthers*, which retells the story of *Dracula*, contains a letter by 'ABRAHAM STOKER', dated 15 December, 1897, the year *Dracula* was published. This note relates how the documents in *Supping with Panthers* are ordered ('I have left three letters where I found them within the pages of the book. Otherwise the papers are arranged by myself.'). As such, the letter recalls Stoker's unsigned preface to *Dracula* ('How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them.'). While the Victorian author's name is absent from the *Dracula* preface, in *Supping with*

²⁰ Barbara Belford (1997[1996]) interprets the altered death of the Count as follows: 'Dracula was spared the ritual vampire death because his staking would be a counterpart to Lucy's orgiastic death—except male to male—something too overtly suggestive for a novel in any genre' (267).

Panthers, the fictional Stoker is explicit about his involvement with the text: he uses the first person pronoun ‘I’ several times and he signs the letter. This note, however, is obviously not penned by Stoker but Holland. In this textual moment, not only is Holland conjuring Stoker’s name and fame, he is also claiming literary affinity with and inheritance from Stoker and in fact, impersonating – that is, writing as and *becoming* – the Victorian author. That *Supping with Panthers* is made up of characters’ memoirs, letters, journal entries and other documents also clearly shows that Holland structures his work with Stoker’s canonical model in mind.²¹ The contemporary writer also recreates a number of altered and uncanny versions of the characters from the Victorian text (such as Lucy and Renfield), which suggests that he assumes the reader’s familiarity with the original.

If this initial instance in Holland’s novel can be read as an evocation and appropriation of Stoker’s authority and a wish to absorb his strength, the overall treatment of the originary author is more complicated and ambiguous, as the two conflicting epigraphs of the book demonstrate. According to Gerard Genette (2001[1997]), ‘choices of authors are more significant than the texts of the epigraphs themselves’ (147), so much so that ‘with a great many epigraphs the important thing is simply the name of the author quoted’ (159). Holland has chosen two well-known male Victorian authors, Arthur Conan Doyle and Stoker, to give himself ‘the consecration and unction of an(other) prestigious filiation’ (Genette, 2001[1997]:160). In the case of *Supping with Panthers*, though, the choice of texts proves as important as the choice of authors. The Doyle quote is from the Sherlock Holmes story *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire* (set in 1896 and released in 1924): ‘Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It’s pure lunacy.’ And the Stoker quote is from *Dracula* itself: ‘The blood is the life’. These two epigraphs offer an ambivalent view of vampirism and of Stoker. Doyle’s citation implicitly mocks Stoker, particularly scenes such as Lucy’s ‘real’ death in which she has a stake driven through her heart, and Holland’s use of it is thus an ironic response to *Dracula*. By drawing attention to Holmes’s refutation of the existence of vampires, Holland underlines the destabilisation of Stoker’s supernatural world. That the contemporary writer places the Doyle quote above the excerpt from *Dracula* may also speak of his prioritised affiliation. Moreover, the Stoker quote – ‘The blood is the life’ – reveals

²¹ James Reese’s *The Dracula Dossier* (2008), another neo-Victorian reworking of *Dracula*, also adopts Stoker’s epistolary approach by including journals, letters and other documents.

Holland's dependence on the Victorian author's 'lifeblood' for his own creation. Taken together, these two conflicting quotes highlight the ambiguous nature of neo-Victorian cannibalism, which is simultaneously critical and reliant on its Victorian predecessors.

It is interesting that Sherlock Holmes also appears in the body of *Supping with Panthers* (Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* is referred to several times); in many ways the detective and the Count are alike.²² Both are 'popular' characters treated as 'the common property of all' and, as a result, both have enjoyed long and independent lives beyond their incipience.²³ (Considering their malleability, both characters would also seem to be natural targets for incorporation and cannibalism by neo-Victorian authors.) By quoting Doyle, Holland is also making it clear that Stoker is by no means his only literary ancestor and through his double reference to the two writers, he positions himself firmly within a particular brand of masculine Victorian literature, that of genre fiction. In the two epigraphs, Holland informs readers what to expect at the outset – his book works within and incorporates existing traditions.

Holland's way of wrestling with Stoker's influence, particularly how he challenges the Victorian author's originary status, is intriguing. Robert Macfarlane (2007) in *Original Copy* contends that certain nineteenth-century texts

call their readers' attention to their own unoriginality. Instead of seeking to conceal, deny, or abolish the very notion of a precursor or precursors, they perform a narrative of their origins. All tip the wink that they are in some way begotten, by devising ways of gently nudging, or sometimes of forcefully shoving, their provenance to the fore. (13)

This description of Victorian novels can also be applied to the three neo-Victorian works under consideration. *Supping with Panthers*, for example, follows *Dracula*'s structure and borrows some of its key characters. By explicitly referencing Stoker, and including him as a character, Holland openly signals his influence and provenance. He does not shy from

²² It is interesting that Leslie S. Klinger has annotated both Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories and Stoker's *Dracula*, using similar methods. Also, the Stoker Estate has endorsed the publication of the 'official' sequel to *Dracula* by Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt (see section VI) and similarly the Conan Doyle Estate agreed to allow Anthony Horowitz to write a new Sherlock Holmes adventure, *House of Silk* (2011).

²³ In the article "'Clap If You Believe in Sherlock Holmes': Mass Culture and the Re-Enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940" (2003), Michael Slater writes, 'Holmes was the first character in modern literature to be widely treated as if he were real and his creator fictitious' (600), suggesting that the longevity of a fictional character sometimes compromises the author's position, a phenomenon we see in the reception of Stoker's *Dracula* as well.

exposing his creative source and, inescapably, his own unoriginality. Yet, he also expresses anxiety about this belated unoriginality by in turn portraying the original author, Stoker, as himself unoriginal. Holland's novel thus exemplifies one psychology of neo-Victorian appropriations of the past: in order to create space for their creativity and fashion their own authorial identity, contemporary writers seek to contain and undermine their literary predecessors. There is a form of self-justification in this move, in the sense that neo-Victorian adaptations seem less parasitic if the original works are unoriginal themselves.²⁴

In *Supping with Panthers*, Holland mixes Stoker's biography and fiction. Stoker is one of the main characters whose journals make up the text and so the Victorian author is treated in the same manner as his own fictional creations in *Dracula*. In the very first entry of his journal within *Supping with Panthers*, Stoker explains why he is documenting events:

I have not the slightest difficulty in recollecting the events which I must here narrate, for they were so striking in themselves, and so remarkable in their conclusion, that I believe anyone would have been impressed by them. I, however, had additional reasons for committing the adventure to memory, for it so happened that I was searching for a good story at the time, with the intention of turning it into a play, or – who knows? – even a work of prose. (130)

What the fictional Stoker recounts in his journal eventually becomes the basis for *Dracula*. That Stoker's narrative is embedded in *Supping with Panthers* means that in his own fiction, Holland is *authoring* the genesis of *Dracula*. This way, he reverses the chronology of creative inspiration and enacts what Harold Bloom in *Anxiety of Influence* (1997[1973]) terms 'Apophrades' – 'the last phase of [one's] revisionary relationship to the dead' (140). According to Bloom, during this phase,

the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that they [the new writers] are being *imitated by their ancestors* [...] The mighty dead return, but they return in our colours, and speaking in our voices, at least in part, at least in moments, moments that testify to our persistence, and not to their own. (141, emphasis original)

²⁴ Other writers confront their anxiety over Stoker's influence differently. Early on in Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* (1992), for example, we are told that Stoker has been put in jail after Count Dracula has married Queen Victoria and is therefore largely absent in the book. This is perhaps a rather uninspired way to both appropriate and contain Stoker in the text. Also, in Ivy Press's *The Original Vampire Diaries* (2010), purportedly written by 'Count Dracula', fun is had at the expense of Stoker – he is referred to as 'mountebank' and 'witless fool', and *Dracula* tops 'The Worst Books' list.

Stoker returns to haunt the contemporary but speaks in Holland's voice. Holland, at least in the world of *Supping with Panthers*, has usurped Stoker's status as originator of the *Dracula* story. The neo-Victorian author even makes a self-reflexive comment on this process within the novel. At one point he has Professor Huree Jyoti Navalkar (the Van Helsing stand-in) write to the fictional Stoker: 'As a Britisher, you will be more familiar with the Roumanian as opposed to the Indian breed [of vampires]. May I suggest in particular the chapters on Transylvania? [...] It was very kind of you, I must say, to consider me as a model for the hero of such a work. [...] [I]f you can make of me the hero of a romance, then I am a Dutchman.' (422).²⁵ Later, the professor comments on Stoker's finished manuscript: 'My thanks for the copy of *Dracula*, which I read last night. It is nonsense, of course – but entertaining nonsense. I predict it will survive. The market for such stuff seems as enduring as your vampire Count himself' (429). This remark by the professor is perhaps also Holland's own self-conscious appraisal of the genre fiction he writes; by saying that although the texts are 'nonsense', they are 'entertaining', he is defending both *Dracula* and *Supping with Panthers*. Because we know that *Dracula* does survive – Holland's revisitation of it attests to the Victorian novel's longevity – the contemporary writer may also express a desire that *Supping with Panthers* might survive, too.

In *Supping with Panthers*, not only does Holland take over Stoker as the originary writer of *Dracula*, he also undermines his literary predecessor's identity as an author. After proclaiming his intention to write 'a good story', the Stoker character seldom mentions the venture again. In real life, according to the biography of Stoker by Daniel Farson, during the staged reading of *Dracula*, Henry Irving 'listened for a few moments with a warning glint of amusement' and when asked afterwards his opinion of it, replied: 'Dreadful!' (qtd. in Skal, 1997:375). In *Supping with Panthers*, Irving's dismissal appears even before *Dracula* is written: 'I proposed that I write a new piece myself. Mr Irving, I regret to say, laughed at this suggestion and branded it "Dreadful"' (130). Although the fictional Stoker says he 'was not discouraged' by Irving's remark, his 'literary exertions' (131) are almost completely abandoned for the majority of the narrative. Instead, Holland foregrounds Stoker's role as manager of the Lyceum theatre, marginalising his literary ambition. The fictional Stoker repeatedly draws attention to his position there: 'the Lyceum was waiting for me', 'I threw

²⁵ Professor Huree Jyoti Navalkar's statement 'I'm a Dutchman' is a *double entendre*. The phrase is an English expression used to indicate that something is clearly not true. In *Dracula*, the Count is from Transylvania and Van Helsing is Dutch.

myself at once into the theatre's affairs and was soon fully preoccupied' (175), 'I felt the thrill which has never faded: that of being manager of the Lyceum Theatre' (177), 'my role as theatre manager' (301), 'it is my duty as the Manager of this theatre' (351).

Holland also significantly includes historical personae and fictional characters from an existing tradition of vampirology, which renders Stoker's contribution imitative and unoriginal. For example, Holland makes reference to John Polidori's 'The Vampyre' (1819), which is considered to be the first tale to feature a gentleman vampire and which some critics suggest influenced Stoker's *Dracula*. Many believe that Polidori, Lord Byron's one-time physician, modelled his vampire on his former employer. This can be seen in Polidori's use of 'Ruthven' as the name for his fictional vampire, a name previously used by Caroline Lamb to denote Byron in *Glenarvon* (1816). Holland incorporates both Polidori and Lord Ruthven as characters. In *Supping with Panthers*, Lord Ruthven is Lord Byron: the two are 'one and the same' (369). Holland's decision to make the poet a literal and enigmatic vampire is partly motivated by Byron's journal note: 'I have written my memoirs; but omitted *all* the really *consequential* and *important* parts from deference to the dead, to the living, and to those who must be both' (*Letters*, 38, emphasis original). Byron also wrote the Turkish tale 'The Giaour' (1813), a poem that makes reference to a cannibalistic vampire.²⁶ The portrayal of Byron in *Supping with Panthers* serves to undermine Stoker's influence as the ultimate inspiration for Holland's work. In an interview, Holland himself alludes to this fact, saying that 'I came to vampires via Lord Byron rather than the other way round. I knew that not only was he the model for Polidori's short story, but also that it was based on a tale he'd told himself' (qtd. in Dodds, 'A Conversation with Tom Holland').

Apart from Polidori and Byron, Holland also appropriates another Victorian vampire figure, Oscar Wilde. Wilde has been interpreted as cannibalistic and vampiric in the essay "'A Wilde Desire Took Me": The Homoerotic History of *Dracula*' (1994), in which Talia Schaffer convincingly argues the possible influence of Wilde, a 'magnetic devourer of innocent boys'

²⁶ See, for example, the following lines:

But first, on earth as Vampire sent,
Thy coarse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life.

Nina Auerbach (1995) describes the vampire in 'The Giaour' as 'a patriarchal, incestuous spirit who eats his dependent women' (17).

(472), on Stoker's conception of the Count. Andrew McCann (2007) notes that twelve years before the publication of *Dracula*, Rosa Caroline Praed had already presented Wilde as a disguised vampire in her *Affinities*,²⁷ which is 'centred around [...] an unmistakable portrait of Oscar Wilde as a "moral vampire"' (176). The eponymous character in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) can also be interpreted as vampire-like, and in *Supping with Panthers* Holland presents a conversation between Lord Ruthven, Wilde and Dr Eliot that could be the inspiration for Wilde's novel. Lord Ruthven says to Wilde that 'A face that did not age would be nothing but a mask. Beneath its show of eternal youth, the spirit would be withering, a hideous mess of corruption and evil' (330), a description that could equally be applied to vampires. This collocation of fictional and 'real-life' vampires, then, emphasises sources that might have influenced Stoker's *Dracula* and further undermines his authorial originality.

Holland challenges Stoker's originary status as a means to confront his own inevitably belated unoriginality. This approach is cannibalistic and vampiric: the contemporary novel relies on draining the vitality of the earlier work for sustenance. In this sense, Holland's method of appropriation and the actual subject matter of *Supping with Panthers* mutually inform one another. If books carry their authors' life-blood, neo-Victorian novels can be said to suck the life-blood of their Victorian predecessors for their own existence. This process is eerily portrayed *in reverse* by Holland in *Supping with Panthers*. Lord Ruthven (that is, Lord Byron), the originator of the Ruthven family, has been 'feeding on his own blood-line' (370) for his own survival. In contemporary works, however, it is literary offspring such as Holland who feed on their predecessors.

V. Leslie S. Klinger's *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008)

Leslie S. Klinger's *The New Annotated Dracula* (hereafter *New Annotated*) has some established predecessors. He mentions, among others, Leonard Wolf's two annotated editions (1975, 1993) and Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal's Norton Critical Edition (1997). There are many annotated *Draculas* because as Neil Gaiman (2007) writes in the introduction to Klinger's work, '*Dracula* is a book that cries out for annotation' (xvi). However, Klinger's contribution to *Dracula* scholarship is markedly different from these earlier works. While previous editors see *Dracula* as fictional, Klinger's conceit is to consider the novel a record

²⁷ One is reminded of Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian novel of a very similar title, *Affinity* (1999).

of real events experienced by real people whose names have been altered to hide and protect their identities and locations.

Through his annotations, Klinger constructs an alternative origin for the Victorian novel. He puts forward the theory that what we believe to be the text of *Dracula* is really an edited version of ‘the Harker Papers’ – Jonathan Harker ostensibly having approached Stoker for help with the documents because although Stoker is ‘little published’, he is nonetheless ‘more “literary”’ (xlix). Klinger’s explanation for the origin of *Dracula* is not that far-fetched, given that the first four chapters of Stoker’s novel are made up of Harker’s journal and the ‘Stoker as editor’ conceit is already present in the original.²⁸ Significantly, Klinger pushes his melding of fictional and real life figures further by suggesting that not only is Stoker merely the editor of *Dracula*, he is, in fact, working ‘under the iron control’ of the Count (I). That is to say, the fictional Stoker in Klinger’s book, like Harker in the original *Dracula* (consider, for example, how the Count dictates Jonathan’s letters), is under Dracula’s influence. In Klinger’s interpretation, then, Stoker has in some sense been taken over, consumed by his own creation.

Klinger is able to create such a ‘gentle fiction’ (xii) regarding the genesis and authenticity of the Victorian text in part because many inconsistencies and errors in the original render Stoker’s authority questionable. For example, in one of his very first notes, Klinger draws attention to the inauthenticity of Stoker’s original novel by quoting Harker: ‘in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of type-writing, except the later note-books of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing’s memorandum’ (6). As we can see in this quote, Klinger’s annotations not only perform the usual function of expanding readers’ understanding and appreciation of the text but also create an additional ‘gentle fiction’ that denies Stoker’s authorship and destabilises his originality.

Any annotated edition is by its nature cannibalistic. Indeed, it is hard to imagine another kind of text which is more so; annotated works ‘swallow’ the bodies of the originals whole. The

²⁸ That the names ‘Stoker’ and ‘Harker’ sound similar has led some critics to speculate that Harker is Stoker’s stand-in. Stoker’s recently-discovered private notebook further consolidates the connection between the Victorian author and his character: ‘There are some definite parallels between this notebook and Jonathan Harker’s journal, and certain entries from Bram’s notebook actually resurfaced twenty-something years later in *Dracula*’ (Flood, 2011).

notes feed on the main text for nourishment and existence: without the main text, there would be no annotated edition. According to Gerard Genette (2001[1997]), the notes, ‘often so closely connected to a given detail in a given text that they have, as it were, no autonomous significance’ (319). The co-existence of the original text and the new text (which is composed of the annotations and new paratextual material) also speaks to a sense of communion between the two discourses. By this logic, all previous annotations of *Dracula* can be seen as cannibalistic. However, Klinger’s work proves more aggressive in its incorporation of not only *Dracula* but of Stoker himself. Klinger’s *New Annotated* is the first of its kind to include the Victorian author’s original manuscript and personal documents (xii). The presentation of the notes in this edition is also more intertwined with the original text than in most previous annotations. In Wolf’s and Auerbach and Skal’s works, the notes are, following the convention of such editions, clearly vertically demarcated from the body of the novel. They are positioned peripherally at the bottom of the page and are presented as non-intrusively as possible. That is, they are structurally and hierarchically subordinated to the privileged main text. In Klinger’s book, however, the annotations often appear in the margins, laterally next to the text of *Dracula*.²⁹ Sometimes, there are also infrapaginal notes, which occupy entire consecutive pages, thus interrupting the normal flow of the original. *The New Annotated Dracula*, then, has a much more entangled and aggressive relationship with Stoker’s novel.

The positioning of the majority of Klinger’s annotations between Stoker’s text and the page edge is reminiscent of printed or handwritten marginalia in medieval manuscripts and older texts. According to William W.S. Sights (2001), adding notes in the margins of manuscripts is ‘a habit that has its roots in ancient writing cultures and reached its apogee in the monasteries and secular scriptoria of Western Europe and England between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries’ (71). Marginating, glossing and annotating was (and still is) a practice conducted by common readers to record their personal and idiosyncratic responses to the authorised texts. Through these notes, readers add their own knowledge to elucidate and refine the central text, make judgements about the writing and show agreement or disagreement with the author. Particularly widespread in the Middle Ages, readers’ marginalia were sometimes copied along with the manuscripts (Sights, 2001:80). Indeed,

²⁹ Another famous annotated Victorian text to use this space is Lewis Carroll’s *The Annotated Alice: The Definition Edition* (1999), edited and introduced by Martin Gardner, with illustrations by John Tenniel. Unlike Klinger, however, Gardner does not argue that the *Alice* stories recount real events.

Slights remarks that 'Notes, comments and glosses are such regular features of medieval English manuscripts that they seem to have been regarded as nearly essential to a serious, valued and valuable book' (80). Even in the eighteenth century, 'annotation was widely practiced and marginalia of special interest or quality circulated privately' (H.J. Jackson, 2001:7).

In recent times, this practice has been much institutionalised and made exclusive to certain readers. The most obvious manifestation of the formalisation of marginalia and annotation is the proliferation of critical versions of canonical texts, described by Genette as a 'vogue of scholarly editions' (337). Most major publishers release classic creative works edited and annotated by academics whose professional position lends them a certain annotative authority. Although each of these editors are subjective readers in some sense inheriting the ancient reading practice of marginalia, their notes do not necessarily convey the same sense of animated dialogue, interaction or argument with the main texts that earlier annotators offer. These notes serve more to improve readers' academic understanding and experience of the works than to parody, challenge or subvert them.

Although Klinger's *New Annotated* to some extent belongs to the tradition of scholarly editions, some of his annotations are more akin to the marginalia found in old manuscripts. This is not only because of their physical placement on the page but also their ironic tone, blending of fact and fiction and the subversive theory they develop which overturns Stoker's authorial and ordinary status. According to Michael Camille (1992), 'For medieval people the margins were places of transformation and paradox, pun and perversity, areas in which social and psychological conflicts could be played out' (1). Klinger makes use of the margins in his book perversely to problematise the reading of the main text and undermine the authority of its author. He questions the authenticity of the very text he painstakingly annotates. This approach to *Dracula* departs from straightforward annotation which aims to supplement the original text in a largely objective manner.

The margins in *New Annotated* are also a site where Klinger plays out his anxieties and wrestles publicly with Stoker's literary influence. His book recalls personal marginalia in which readers comment, critique and contest a book so that the incongruent voices of author and reader are juxtaposed in the same space. More significantly, by filling the page margins

with text, Klinger's practice provides a literal example of the contemporary attempt to revitalise marginal voices in society and history. Yet, like other neo-Victorian texts, Klinger's notes depend on the main body of *Dracula* for existence. We see a demonstration of cannibalism and aggressive ambivalence in action: the annotations both rid and rely upon the Victorian ancestor.

Klinger chooses to work on *Dracula* because according to him, it is 'one of the most influential books of the nineteenth century' (xi). His acknowledgement of the text's place in Victorian literature reveals his awareness of its cultural capital and commercial appeal. On this point, it is interesting that Klinger has previously published *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes* (2004), another famous example of Victorian genre fiction, whose character and events Klinger treats as real.

The 'gentle fiction' of Klinger's annotations may also be viewed as a form of parody or 'satirical simulation' (Genette, 2001[1997]:343) of pedantic scholarly commentary. This does not suggest that his notes are not informative and erudite. He writes: 'I also provide background information on the times, using contemporary Victorian sources, to understand the history, culture, technology, and vocabulary of those remarkable individuals' (xii). Indeed, Neil Gaiman believes that Klinger's annotations are illuminating regardless of whether the readers accept the theories he presents. By using some fictional annotations, however, Klinger is knowingly setting his work apart from traditional academic editions. His condescension towards academia is clear: 'In recent years, *Dracula* has become a cottage industry for esteemed academics and serious scholars, who see the text as proof of virtually every wrong that may be blamed on the Victorians.' (xii). Klinger's derogatory expression 'cottage industry' suggests academic investigation of *Dracula* is disingenuous, bijou and farmed, even though he is engaged in a similar enterprise. Still, Klinger states claims his approach to *Dracula* aims at restoring 'a sense of wonder, excitement, and sheer fun to this great work' (xii) and thus provides a less scholarly take on the text. In his own way, Klinger suggests a more approachable means of responding to Victorian fiction is via the apparatus of fiction itself (or to be more accurate, a combination of fiction and scholarship), an idea echoed in the texts discussed in Chapter Four, 'Academic Cannibals'.

Klinger seeks a restoration of ‘wonder, excitement, and sheer fun’ to *Dracula*. The fun is had, however, at the expense of Stoker, whom Klinger demotes from sole author to co-editor. Like Holland in *Supping with Panthers*, Klinger also emphasises Stoker’s involvement with the Lyceum Theatre. In *New Annotated*, it is ‘the press of work’ at the theatre that kept Stoker from publishing the Harker Papers before *Dracula*’s intrusion. Klinger also points to Stoker’s consideration of the market appeal of his book (16) and his ‘plagiarisms’ in the descriptions of Transylvania (17). There is, then, a slightly cynical edge to Klinger’s dedication: ‘To Bram Stoker’. Genette writes that a book dedication is ‘the proclamation (sincere or not) of a relationship (of one kind or another) between the author and some people, group, or entity’ (135). Sincere or not, Klinger’s dedication suggests an evocation of the ‘moral, intellectual, or aesthetic backing’ of Stoker, the ‘privileged addressee’ (136). The dedication is followed by a quote from *Dracula*: ‘We want no proofs; we ask none to believe us!’ Taken out of the context of the novel, the ‘we’ in the quotation can smoothly refer to Stoker and Klinger. As such, Klinger claims bold literary affinity and justifies, perhaps, his ‘gentle fiction’; just as Stoker does not ask for belief, so Klinger may not call for trust.

VI. Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt’s *Dracula the Un-Dead* (2009)

Anyone picking up Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt’s *Dracula the Un-Dead* (hereafter *The Un-Dead*) would not fail to notice that it is an ‘official’ sequel to the original novel endorsed by the Stoker Estate and that one of the co-authors is Stoker’s descendant. These details are widely used in promotional material and are presented on the front and back covers of the book in bold type to add to its appeal. It is perhaps not entirely cynical to suggest that Dacre Stoker is capitalising on his ancestor’s cultural capital by re-packaging *Dracula*. But the book proves to be more complicated than a relatively innocuous, if slightly opportunistic, sequel. The relationship between the neo-Victorian text and its original is aggressive on several levels. To begin with, Dacre Stoker and Holt incorporate Stoker’s original title, which was *The Un-Dead*, and the subsequently selected *Dracula*, for their title.³⁰ This seems to suggest that the new text has entirely incorporated the history of the original. The duo also incorporate Stoker’s own handwritten notes, which they claim to have consulted and three of

³⁰ The dramatic abridgement of the book which Stoker presented at a staged reading at the Lyceum Theatre was titled *Dracula, Or, The Un-Dead* (Farson, 1975:163), which is very close to Dacre Stoker and Holt’s title for their novel. Also, it is unclear whether the duo knew Freda Warrington’s *Dracula the Undead*, a sequel to *Dracula* commissioned by Penguin Books, first published in 1997 and reprinted in 2009, coinciding with the publication of the ‘official’ sequel. Interestingly, commenting on the title *The Un-Dead*, Barbara Belford (1997[1996]) writes, ‘a novel called *The Un-dead* would never have endured into the twenty-first century’ (269). Ironically, it has.

its pages are cannibalised in their book (pp. 417-419). The use of Stoker's notes can be seen for example in the inclusion in the new text of the character Inspector Cotford, who appears in the notes but was excluded in the final version of *Dracula*. *The Un-Dead* also kills off all the original characters one by one (at the end of the book, Quincey Harker, the only surviving character, boards *Titanic* – we know his likely fate), thus denying all possibility of new stories for the personae. As such, Dacre Stoker and Holt's text is rather tyrannical: it completely devours the original novel. Most significantly and perhaps unusually for an 'official' sequel, *The Un-Dead* also questions Stoker's authorship of *Dracula*.

Set in 1912, *The Un-Dead* portrays a world very different from that in *Dracula*. In Stoker's original, we see a group of male characters who 'represent the restorative powers of traditional patriarchal rule and the metaphysical world-view that rule accompanies' (Rogers, 2000:xv). In the new text, however, the original cast members are all severely disturbed as a result of their contact with Dracula twenty-five years earlier: 'Seward has succumbed completely to morphine addiction. Arthur has unsuccessfully sought relief from his grief over the loss of Lucy in another marriage, isolating himself from his former friends. Van Helsing, now an old man, is still obsessed with tracking down the monster. Jonathan and Mina's marriage has been irreparably strained by their respective memories of Dracula' (Miller, 2009:393-394). Although these are logical and even expected consequences of their encounters with the Count, the denigration of these formerly brave characters speaks to a collapse of 'patriarchal rule' – the professional men are no longer the proud representatives of the best British society can offer.

If *The Un-Dead* sets out to subvert the social order established in Stoker's text, it does so most overtly by revealing that Dracula, the ultimate evil in the original, is in fact a wronged hero.³¹ He travels to London from Transylvania in 1888 (the year has been manipulated) to stop the real villainess, the lesbian vampiress Elizabeth Bathory, who is also 'Jack the Ripper', from killing more prostitutes in Whitechapel.³² Casting a female *and* a lesbian as the

³¹ Stoker and Holt's more empathetic portrayal of the vampire may be influenced by other contemporary works which seek to allow the vampires 'to tell their own stories and consequently become more sympathetic' (Punter and Byron, 2004:271). Examples include Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape* (1975), Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and Jody Scott's *I, Vampire* (1984).

³² The use of Elizabeth Bathory in a neo-*Dracula* text can be found in Raymond Rudorff's *The Dracula Archives* (1971) as well. It is also not uncommon to see traces of Jack the Ripper in critical analyses and fictional reinterpretations of *Dracula*. Stoker himself even alludes to the gruesome Whitechapel murderer in his introduction to the Icelandic edition of his book (1901). See, for example, Nicholas Rance's "'Jonathan's Great

villainess is interesting, an approach also adopted by Holland in *Supping with Panthers*, although not to the same extent as in *The Un-Dead*. Homosexual females were ‘doubly’ marginalised in Victorian literature in terms of their gender and sexual orientation; they are among the type of characters regularly given voices in revisionist neo-Victorian texts,³³ the most well-known of which by Sarah Waters.³⁴ While Dracula’s bi-sexuality in the Victorian novel is only implied – he bites (penetrates) the females but there is a threat he may violate males as well – in *The Un-Dead*, the sexuality of the vampiress is abundantly clear.³⁵

When seen in the context of the neo-Victorian genre, *The Un-Dead*’s representation of an all-evil lesbian villainess could be read as a response to the type of marginalised subjects selected for scrutiny in contemporary works. On the one hand, it is hardly original to have elements of ‘deviant’ sexuality in a neo-Victorian text. On the other, it is rather unconventional to make a homosexual character an antagonist in the prevailingly politically correct environment of the neo-Victorian. The two male authors may be attempting to normalise their lesbian character, as portraying her as a victim would be a continuation of the textual suppression that occurs in other neo-Victorian novels. But it is also possible to say that Dacre Stoker and Holt are extremely conservative. While the role of the cultural and social other is filled by Dracula in Stoker’s novel, the two contemporary authors put a lesbian vampiress in his place, thereby perpetuating and expanding on the prejudices traditionally imposed upon the ‘other’, now a foreigner (the historical countess was Hungarian), a woman and a homosexual.

The portrayal of Dracula as the embodiment of goodness and benevolence in *The Un-Dead* is problematic. In the analyses of Stoker’s text, Dracula is commonly considered to be a metaphor of transgressive otherness that threatens the stability and moral safety of the British empire. Late Victorian fears of sexual inversion and reverse colonisation (Punter and Byron, 2004:232; Arata, 1990), for example, are projected onto the foreign Count. The vampire is destroyed (albeit ambiguously) or exorcised at the close of the original novel, and the ending

Knife”: *Dracula* meets Jack the Ripper’ (2002), for a discussion of the association between Dracula and Jack the Ripper.

³³ See, for example, Rachel Carroll’s ‘Rethinking Generational History: Queer Histories of Sexuality in Neo-Victorian Feminist Fiction’ (2006).

³⁴ Her trio of neo-Victorian novels, *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) famously explore nineteenth-century lesbian themes.

³⁵ Lesbian vampirism is perhaps an homage to Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* (1872), which was in turn inspired by Coleridge’s poem ‘Christabel’ (1816).

returns to the safe domestic unit of the bourgeois family. In *The Un-Dead*, however, we are told that all the previous prejudiced assumptions critics have about Dracula are misguided and must be reconsidered, that the 'other' is in fact the wronged hero. *The Un-Dead*, then, undermines and deconstructs the underlying premise of Stoker's text, that is, the battle between good and evil. The Count's changed fortune may be viewed as an extreme case of revisionism. While in other neo-Victorian texts, traditionally marginalised characters are given 'justice', now Dracula, a cultural, temporal, sexual and social outsider, and his associated aggregation of 'otherness', is positively re-evaluated. If this is indeed Dacre Stoker and Holt's agenda (Dacre Stoker remarks that they want to give 'dignity' back to Stoker and Dracula), their text is original and provoking. Unfortunately, in their attempt to address the stereotypical representation of the 'Other' (i.e. Dracula), they put a substitute 'Other' (i.e. Countess Bathory) in his place.

In their books, Holland and Klinger draw readers' attention to Stoker's role as the manager of the Lyceum Theatre; Dacre Stoker and Holt likewise focus on this aspect of the Victorian author's biography. And just as in the two other books, *The Un-Dead* uses Stoker's involvement with the theatre to undermine his identity as a creative writer. However, if Stoker is slightly unflatteringly portrayed in Holland's and Klinger's works, he is much more poorly represented in *The Un-Dead*. In the novel, Henry Irving has died, leaving the Lyceum Theatre to Stoker. Without Irving the theatre is failing, and Stoker is determined to revitalise it by staging an adaptation of *Dracula*. He hopes the production will prove a financial success and at the same time vindicate his literary ambition: '*Dracula* was Bram Stoker's last chance. One last chance to prove himself as a writer; one last chance to live his dream; one last chance to keep his theatre' (83). However, it turns out that Stoker did not write *Dracula* entirely by himself but has plagiarised much of Van Helsing's biography. At one point, the professor complains, 'Through him [Stoker], I intended to pass on all the wisdom I had gained. My biography was to be a warning to future generations, a guidebook on how to battle the supernatural creatures I had fought my entire life. Instead, Stoker penned a fanciful mockery of the truth' (316). In *The Un-Dead*, then, Stoker's authorship of *Dracula* is directly challenged and even denied.³⁶ Admittedly, *The Un-Dead* is not the first neo-Victorian novel to represent a nineteenth-century author as a plagiarist. Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1998), for

³⁶ Dacre Stoker is not the only one of Stoker's relatives to sully the family name. Daniel Farson, Stoker's nephew, attributes the cause of Stoker's demise to tertiary syphilis, thereby 'sensationalis[ing] his uncle's death' (Belford, 1997[1996]:320).

example, portrays Tobias Oates (Dickens's stand in) as a plagiarist who steals the life story of the convict Jack Maggs (i.e. Magwitch). But at least Carey uses a pseudonym for Dickens and is not a Dickens himself.

The portrayal of Stoker in *The Un-Dead* seems to be at odds with Dacre Stoker's expressed desire to 'give both Bram and Dracula back their dignity' (401). He writes that 'I felt Bram needed to be a character in this story, so we could finally give him a share of the limelight' (404) and in fact the sequel is dedicated to his great-granduncle: 'For Bram, thank you for your inspiration, and your guidance'. Reminiscent of Klinger's tribute to the Victorian author, Dacre Stoker and Holt's dedication is more problematic. Genette (2001[1997]) believes that a dedication 'implicates' the dedicatee as 'a kind of ideal inspirer' (136). The duo's expanded explanation for their gratitude, 'for your inspiration, and your guidance', seems over emphatic; so eager are they to identify their source of inspiration they refer to it explicitly on as many occasions as possible.

For Dacre Stoker, the dedication is an interesting combination of the private and the public. The private dedicatee has a personal relationship such as friendship or kinship with the writer, while the public dedicatee is a well-known person (Genette, 2001[1997]:131). By dedicating a work to a public dedicatee, a writer 'indicates a relationship that is public in nature – intellectual, artistic, political, or other' (ibid.). Dacre Stoker, then, cannibalises both kinship and intellectual affiliation. Dedication, according to Genette, is always 'a matter of demonstration, ostentation, exhibition' and is always 'at the service of the work [...] for elevating the work's standing' (135). This is certainly true in the case of *Dracula: The Un-Dead*, which uses the dedication to Stoker to elevate itself. However, portraying his blood (private) and literary (public) ancestor as a plagiarist in his book can hardly be regarded as a respectful act on Dacre Stoker's part and might even be seen as counterproductive. This discrepancy is perhaps explained by neo-Victorianism's ambiguous relationship to the Victorian, in which it strives both to emulate and undermine. *The Un-Dead* can be seen as both endeavouring to be 'elevated' to the level of *Dracula* while at the same time compromising Stoker's authorial position.

In *The Un-Dead*, we are faced with a complicated and yet typical case of anxiety of influence: a contemporary author undermining the originary status of a literary predecessor in order to

be original himself. It is interesting to note that in the ‘Acknowledgments’, Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt both make reference to Dacre’s Stoker bloodline. Holt writes: ‘Flesh of the original flesh, blood of the original blood’ (422) and Dacre Stoker himself writes: ‘I would like to offer *Dracula the Un-Dead* to all who carry the Stoker blood’ (423). What they mean is that now Stoker’s blood – his originality and vitality – also flows in Dacre Stoker.

VII. Conclusion: ‘Dragging *their* fantasies’

If *Girl in a Blue Dress* and *Wanting* cannibalise Dickens’s biography to discuss broader social concerns, what do the texts discussed in this chapter achieve with their cannibalisation of *Dracula* and Stoker’s biography? Their simultaneous appropriation of the Victorian novel and its author do not follow particular socio-political agendas, even though the original book, which has been called ‘a compendium of fin-de-siècle phobias’ (Auerbach, 1995a:7), has inspired much analysis of nineteenth-century issues relating to gender (in particular, the New Woman), race, class, imperialism (or reverse colonialism), religion and (homo)sexuality. True, the contemporary texts do offer some interesting interpretations of Stoker’s novel. More often than not, however, they are derivative and tend to recycle plots already used by earlier writers, or adapt scholars’ interpretations of the text. Their cannibalism of *Dracula*, then, has a closer affinity with the ‘savage cannibalism’ described by Freud than forms of cannibalism relating to mourning or the preservation of the dead in the living. In Freudian analysis, endocannibalism bespeaks an anxiety of influence: ‘cannibal savages [...] devoured their victim [the primal father] [...] and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength’ (Freud, 1919:142). When discussing how neo-Victorian fiction quotes nineteenth-century writers, Christian Gutleben borrows from Linda Hutcheon: ‘the purpose of quoting examples from the works of the great was to lend their prestige and authority to one’s own text’ (qtd. in Gutleben, 2001:21). The novels discussed in this chapter ‘quote’ Stoker’s *Dracula* for his strength (‘prestige and authority’, for Hutcheon) but do not necessarily present new and relevant social commentary.

The lack of originality in the neo-*Dracula* texts may result from what I call ‘ideology exhaustion’; that is, an environment in which it is difficult for writers to add new interpretations to a canonical text. This new breed of neo-Victorian novels that employs the vampire figure may reflect that in a more politically-correct society, it has become less

acceptable to explicitly project our fears onto an 'Other'. As a result, the vampire has become a misunderstood 'other' or even, 'one of us'. In popular culture – such as the *Lost Boys* films (1987-2010), Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* novels (2005-2008) and the television shows *True Blood* (2008-) and *Being Human* (2008-) – vampires have been used as sympathetic metaphors for the minority experience, highlighting contemporary prejudices and injustice. Textual adaptations of *Dracula* seem to lag behind these socially-resonant updates.³⁷ One symptom that the neo-*Dracula* texts do underscore in the culture in which they intervene is the writers' and readers' attraction to *Dracula*'s cultural capital. The contemporary writers are eager to revisit the story for commercial purposes and readers are hungry for more. As such, the contemporary texts are themselves a form of vampire, feeding on the essence of the famous Victorian novel for subsistence. Yet, these writers also prove ambivalent towards their incorporation of Stoker. Aware of their own unoriginality and cannibalism, they react by repressing the originality of Stoker, reducing him to little more than a character in his own work. Daniel Farson (1975), discussing some 'astounding interpretations' of *Dracula* made by certain American professors (the story is a tale of fratricide or parricide or Stoker's distorted autobiography, among others), notes that 'in dragging *their* fantasies from the subconscious, they deny the power of Bram Stoker's imagination which, ultimately, was alone responsible for his masterpiece' (160-161, emphasis original). Likewise, the contemporary novelists' new versions of *Dracula* equally undermine Stoker's creativity by suggesting alternative origins for his vampire story. In this way, they live out their own subconscious fantasies of conceiving a work of *Dracula*'s stature and longevity by dragging Stoker down to their own level.

³⁷ In 1975, Daniel Farson mused, 'with today's tastes it is surprising there hasn't been a Dragula' (168-169). The word 'dragula' has, however, entered the online lexicon *Urban Dictionary*: 'A male vampire who prefers to dress in women's clothes'. There is also a song of the same title by 'Rob Zombie', released in 1998.

CHAPTER THREE

Contesting (Post-)colonialism: *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Three Neo-Victorian Rejoinders

‘Yes, Bertha was closer the mark. Captive. Ragôt. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal.’ –Michelle Cliff (1987)

‘There is a strong tradition of what is called literary cannibalism in the Caribbean. A lot of people have done it before me.’ –Maryse Condé (1999)

This chapter establishes the important connection between two recent literary responses to Victorian literature, namely, the wider neo-Victorian genre and a more specific subset of it, which reconsiders the nineteenth century from a postcolonial perspective. These two are yoked together and manifested in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the foundational neo-Victorian text. I argue that apart from incorporating canonical nineteenth-century celebrities and texts, contemporary writers also appropriate ideas about Victorian empire. That Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the foundational postcolonial neo-Victorian text prompts the reading of its pre-text, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, as a foundational colonial Victorian work. I tease out the cannibalistic, Caribbean and (post)colonial elements in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. After that, I read a group of Anglo-American neo-Victorian novels which return to both Brontë’s and Rhys’s models. In particular, I focus on how they reorient the narrative focus away from the empowered Creole Antoinette (a reworked version of Bertha Mason) in *Wide Sargasso Sea* back to the British characters of *Jane Eyre*. I consider this shift of narrative attention away from Antoinette/Bertha as a problematic commentary on (and possible rejection of) the corrective postcolonial agenda found in neo-Victorian novels such as *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

I. Writing back: Victorian colonialism, neo-Victorian postcolonialism

As discussed in Chapter Two, one way contemporary writers incorporate the power and substance of the nineteenth century is through cannibalising its texts. Political issues are often central to their reworkings of the Victorian; thus, some writers specifically appropriate nineteenth-century material which can be used to discuss the British empire. Simon Joyce in ‘The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror’ (2002) singles out ‘triumphalist imperialism’ as a defining feature of the nineteenth century (4), while Kate Mitchell in *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2010) considers ‘colonialism’ one of the ‘features of history’ contemporary writers return to when reconstructing the Victorian past (2). Grace Moore in ‘Twentieth-Century Re-Workings of the Victorian Novel’ (2008) believes that the ‘postcolonial backlash against a continuing valorisation of the English literary canon’ (134) contributes to contemporary reinvention of the Victorian and that ‘the expanse of Victorian cultural imperialism and its legacy in the era of decolonisation’ has turned Victorian revisionism into a ‘global phenomenon’ (137). The interplay between colonialism and postcolonialism can be seen in a number of novels in the neo-Victorian corpus that

specifically employ imperialism as background and/or are written from postcolonial perspectives, the most notable works being Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*. (Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*, discussed in Chapter One and set in part in nineteenth-century Tasmania, also belongs to this group.) These texts, often written by authors from previously colonised countries, contribute to the globalisation of the neo-Victorian. They highlight that the Victorian literary ancestor is usually more 'mythic' than directly 'familial' and speak to the flexibility of the genre, which is capable of encompassing a wide variety of perspectives.

British empire, of which imperialism and colonialism are crucial manifestations, was a central feature of the politics of Victorian foreign and domestic history.¹ Philippa Levine in *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (2007) describes the centrality of imperialism to nineteenth-century British life: 'schoolchildren, exhibition-goers, novel readers and stamp collectors' all understood that 'Britain's greatness was in large part because of its imperial mission and its imperial possessions' (ix). It is significant that Levine includes 'novel readers' here, as imperialism is pervasive in Victorian literary works. Indeed, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) asserts that 'It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English' (243). Imperialism is especially explicit in colonial romances and adventure stories. It can also be seen in domestic fiction,² albeit less clearly. Although these domestic novels tend to focus primarily on events in Britain, colonialism is still evident within the works even if only in passing or through suggestion. Still, it is believed that the nineteenth-century British novel is 'an originary moment' in the production of imperialist narratives (O'Connor, 2003:218). In the past few decades especially, works by cultural critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Suwendrini Perera and Firdous Azim have urged for a more sensitive and 'worldly' reading of imperialism and colonialism in Victorian literature. They have drawn attention to the simultaneously prominent and sublimated representation of the empire in nineteenth-century

¹ Robert J.C. Young (2001) provides a clear distinction between 'imperialism' and 'colonialism', two facets of empire. 'Imperialism' refers to the structure of an empire 'that was bureaucratically controlled by a government from the centre, and which was developed for ideological as well as financial reasons', while 'colonial' refers to the structure of an empire 'that was developed for settlement by individual communities or for commercial purposes by a trading company' (16).

² 'A mere domestic novel' is how Charlotte Brontë described *Jane Eyre* after the book was published in 1847: 'A mere domestic novel will I fear seem trivial to men of large views and solid attainments' (qtd. in Thomas, 2008:1).

fiction as well as the benefits of colonialism as an enabling factor for the production of culture in Britain. In fact, this argument is so convincing and essential to Victorian studies today that it is now impossible to be completely oblivious to the imperialistic and colonial elements in some of the representative Victorian works.

At the same time as postcolonial critical works have gained influence, there has been a concurrent development in postcolonial literature which seeks to explore the implications of imperialism. The centrality of the empire to the history of former colonies and its previous relative absence in fiction has compelled contemporary novelists to address the topic. Authors from former colonies often write from a deeply-felt personal and political compulsion to confront the history of their own nations. As a result of these writers' literary endeavours and the expanded research into the topic by academics, the history of imperialism and colonialism has become more widely known and influential to authors around the world. Although colonial elements in nineteenth-century fiction may now strike us as blatantly apparent, this was not historically the case, and some neo-Victorian postcolonial novels have therefore sought to explore these elements and overtly redress history. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jack Maggs* respond to formerly sublimated colonial aspects of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

That colonialism is an important aspect of the neo-Victorian genre is perhaps most evident in the fact that, as mentioned in the Introduction, its foundational text is Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*.³ This novel provides a postcolonial rewriting of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, a 'classic and now firmly canonical fiction' (Kaplan, 2007:16), by fleshing out the story of the first Mrs Rochester prior to her arrival in England from the recently emancipated West Indies.⁴ *Jane Eyre* has remained 'a steady seller and a popular read' (ibid.) since the nineteenth century and

³ It is interesting to note that Jean Rhys's own life (1890-1979), like neo-Victorian fiction, crosses the boundary of the Victorian and the modern.

⁴ Caribbean revisiting of *Jane Eyre* can be found as early as 1859. In *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* (2008), Sue Thomas studies *Cousin Stella; or Conflict* (1859) by Henrietta Camilla Jenkin, a white Creole. The book is, according to Thomas, 'the first Caribbean reworking of *Jane Eyre*' which 'prefigures aspects of *Wide Sargasso Sea*' (104). Jacques Tourneur's film *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) also relocates the story of *Jane Eyre* to the fictional Caribbean island of St. Sebastian (Burstein, 'Oh, The Futility! Adapting *Jane Eyre*').

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys changes the temporal setting from 1799-1809 in *Jane Eyre* to the 1830s and 1840s to explore the immediate aftermath of the emancipation of the West Indies, an event that has significant bearing on the economical, psychological and personal development of her central character, Antoinette. Sylvie Maurel (1998) believes that Rhys's reference to the Emancipation can be read as her triumphing over Brontë's influence (137).

has continued to attract subsequent writers to its cultural capital. Indeed, as Cora Kaplan points out, 'Imitations and variations on its plot and character began to appear within a few years of its publication' (ibid.).⁵ Although published during the decolonising period, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is now mostly affiliated with postcolonialism, John Thieme (2001), calling it 'the best-known postcolonial response to the Brontës' (73). Peter Hulme (1994a) likewise contends that it is 'an essential text for West Indian literature [and] for 'third world' or post-colonial writing more generally' (10). In assigning *Wide Sargasso Sea* the role of foundational text of the neo-Victorian genre, it is important to keep in mind that there are a number of other possible (and earlier) candidates for the role, not least Robert Graves's *The Real David Copperfield* (1933), Michael Sadleir's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940) and Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-longue* (1953).⁶ Still, most critics have chosen Rhys's text over others, in part because it sets a rough agenda and criteria for subsequent works.

However, if *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the 'originary' text of the genre, it departs from later neo-Victorian novels in the sense that its style is akin to the high modernist fashion rather than Victorian pastiche; Rhys does not seek to 'perform' or 'forge' the Victorian stylistically. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the product of an aesthetic and a tradition rather different to the neo-Victorian 'proper' we are familiar with. This explains why although some scholars of *Wide Sargasso Sea* have found it productive to study the work in conjunction with its Victorian

⁵ See Patsy Stoneman's *Brontë Transformations* (1996) for a discussion of fictive works revisiting Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* from the nineteenth to the late twentieth century. The Brontë sisters, like Charles Dickens and Bram Stoker discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two respectively, also receive biofictional treatment in neo-Victorian novels, especially Charlotte Brontë, who is the subject of novels such as James Tully's *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë: The Secrets of a Mysterious Family* (1999), Michèle Roberts's *The Mistressclass* (2003), Sheila Kohler's *Becoming Jane* (2009), Syrie James's *The Secret Diaries of Charlotte Brontë* (2009) and Juliet Gael's *Romancing Miss Brontë* (2010). Jill Jones's *Emily's Secret* (1995) and Denise Giardina's *Emily's Ghost* (2009), on the other hand, primarily focus on Emily Brontë, while Jude Morgan's *Charlotte and Emily: A Novel of the Brontës* (2010, first published under the title *The Taste of Sorrow* in 2009) is about both sisters. Like Dickens's unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Charlotte Brontë's incomplete *Emma Brown* (1853) also inspires writers to 'complete' the work, as is the case of Clare Boylan's *Emma Brown* (2003).

⁶ In *50 Literature Ideas You Really Need to Know* (2010), John Sutherland identifies Robert Graves's *The Real David Copperfield* (1933) as the origin of the 'so called post-Victorian Victorian novels'. Sutherland sees these 'post-Victorian Victorian novels' as consuming the past, that they 'chew the gum other writers have left behind them' (114). In 'Using the Victorians: The Victorian Age in Contemporary Fiction' (2000), Robin Gilmour writes that Michael Sadleir's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940) and Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-longue* (1953) are early examples of 'the kind of work which is inward with the period and the conventions of its literature, and draws on the meanings which these have come to have for us today' (189). Jonathan Loesberg (2007) also singles out Sadler's *Fanny by Gaslight* as 'the first version of the genre', by which he means 'some form of binocular narrative, a narrative structure that makes us explicitly aware of seeing the Victorian period from a contemporary standpoint' (363).

On the other hand, when discussing the neo-Victorian novel in *New Directions: Writing Post 1990* (2010), Fiona Tolan favours Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), which appeared one year after *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as a precursor of the genre (26-17).

colonial pre-text, they have not analysed the pair in such a way as to draw overarching conclusions regarding the relationship between contemporary fiction and Victorian literature.⁷ Neo-Victorian scholars' appropriation of a modernist Caribbean text thus points to important ideologies in the production and circulation of neo-Victorian knowledge.⁸

A cynical take on neo-Victorian's retrospective claiming of *Wide Sargasso Sea* might lead one to conjecture that it is a means to contain and cannibalise the Other or an attempt to co-opt a Caribbean text to make the genre appear more international.⁹ More importantly, the genre's appropriation of Rhys's text has ideological implications; it reveals significant parallels between the postcolonial and the neo-Victorian modes of historical exploration. At once a postcolonial and neo-Victorian work, *Wide Sargasso Sea* primarily relies on a return to one nineteenth-century novel, *Jane Eyre*, for inspiration and the exposition of its multifaceted feminist, personal and postcolonial agendas.¹⁰ As such, Rhys's novel demonstrates meaningful common ground between the two responses to Victorian fiction and articulates how they might inform one another. While postcolonial texts often adopt a corrective approach to history and contest the hegemony of the colonial literary canon, revisionism is also a defining aspect of neo-Victorianism. Neo-Victorian writers can be seen as writing back against the titans of Victorian literature, who are in some sense their literary colonisers. When I say literary colonisers, I am referring to the influence that Victorian authors continue to exert over contemporary writers, an influence so powerful that even over a hundred years later, writers still conceive and mould their work in the likeness of their Victorian predecessors, albeit simultaneously asserting differences. This is reminiscent of postcolonial mimicry, a strategy adopted by writers from formerly colonised spaces to 'interrogate' European literary and cultural traditions (Huggan, 2008:642). In both the

⁷ John Thieme (2001) points out that West Indian critics such as Wally Look Lai and Kenneth Ramchand study *Wide Sargasso Sea* without making any reference to *Jane Eyre* (79).

⁸ *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s 'Caribbean' status is not uncontested. The Jamaican Edward Kamau Brathwaite believes that works by Rhys, 'a white creole expatriate West Indian-born novelist', should not be considered West Indian (Hulme, 1994b:74). However, other West Indian critics such as Wally Look Lai, Kenneth Ramchand, John Hearne and Louis James are happy to claim *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a significant Caribbean novel (ibid.).

⁹ By using the term 'contain', I am consciously making reference to Homi Bhabha's idea expressed in an interview with Jonathan Rutherford (1990): 'A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that "these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid". This is what I mean by a *creation* of cultural diversity and a *containment* of cultural difference' (208, emphasis original). The use of the term 'cannibalise' is also conscious. The neo-Victorian genre can be seen as cannibalistic, not only because of its aggressive incorporation of Victorian elements, but also because there is a tendency among critics of this genre to characterise anything with some nineteenth-century elements as neo-Victorian.

¹⁰ *The Orchid House* (1953) by the Dominican author Phyllis Shand Allfrey is said to be another inter-text in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Thieme, 2001:84).

postcolonial and neo-Victorian projects we see the same pattern: an ancestor is identified and then cannibalised to serve an ideological purpose. It is therefore appropriate to say that the neo-Victorian is postcolonial in outlook and in ideological construction. *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s place at the beginning of the neo-Victorian genre is due to its revisionist and combative tone which later works have followed, and not its linguistic and stylistic conventions which are modernist instead of pseudo-Victorian.

II. *Jane Eyre*: The colonial, cannibal and Caribbean connection

If we consider *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a foundational postcolonial neo-Victorian work, it might be productive to view its original, *Jane Eyre*, through a similar lens; that is, as a foundational colonial Victorian novel. Unlike the neo-Victorian genre whose history is relatively chartable and uncomplicated, it is perhaps difficult to pinpoint a particular nineteenth-century work as the 'originary' colonial novel. Still, the important position *Jane Eyre* occupies in the Victorian colonial discourse is beyond dispute. Peter Hulme (1994b) calls it 'one of the novels which forms the imperialist canon' (72). Carine M. Mardorossian (2007) believes that *Jane Eyre* is 'the most widely discussed Victorian narrative by scholars of British colonial discourse' and suggests that Brontë's novel has now become the text every postcolonial critic has to 'cut her teeth on' (1) – an image suited to the cannibalistic. Mardorossian's use of the female pronoun points to the close connection between *Jane Eyre* and its women readers. Cora Kaplan (2007) also acknowledges the novel's influence on female readers, calling it is a 'mnemonic symbol, a Western cultural monument which has moved generations of its mainly women readers to tears of desire and rage, as well as of loss' (15), and noting its direct or oblique relationship to 'proto-feminist themes' (16). *Jane Eyre* is also regarded as the 'point of origin' (O'Connor, 2003:222) in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism' (1985), an essay considered to be 'a primal scene of postcolonial reading, the place where many of the guiding assumptions and logical premises of postcolonial thinking about Victorian fiction were born' (O'Connor, 2003:220). Whether or not *Jane Eyre* leads colonial literature, it is, along with William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), undoubtedly important in the colonial discourse.

Brontë adopts the West Indies as one of the geographical settings in her novel. The location is significant for its place in the history of British colonialism and economy and for its 'primacy

in the encounter between Europe and America, civilisation and savagery' (Hulme 1992[1986]:3). At the nexus of this encounter were the region's sugar plantations, which produced the then luxury good for Europe. British sugar plantations first relied on slave labour from Africa and then later indentured servants from throughout the empire, a highly exploitative system whose effects are still being felt today and lie at the heart of many of the region's postcolonial contestations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the moral implications of the sugar trade, Brontë's use of the Caribbean in *Jane Eyre* is seemingly peripheral and 'incidental' (Lerner, 1989:278) – the place is only mentioned explicitly a few times in the entire novel.¹¹ Carl Plasa (2004) contends that the book is reticent about 'the form of British colonial oppression in the West Indies' (xiv) and Franco Moretti (1998) believes that the West Indies is used in *Jane Eyre* retrospectively and dubiously, as a kind of 'mythic geography' (27). Nevertheless, the treatment of the locale in Brontë's novel has not only inspired Caribbean postcolonial responses but also crucially placed the Victorian text in imperial and colonial discourse.¹²

Jane Eyre belongs to a long tradition of works which have incorporated the Caribbean, many of which have explored themes of colonialism and cannibalism. For example, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-1) uses Montaigne's essay 'Of Cannibals' as an intertext and has a character named 'Caliban', a nearly anagrammatic rendering of 'cannibal' (Hulme, 1992[1986]:3).¹³ The play also inspired Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête*, which provides an 'affectionate contention with Shakespeare for the right to represent the Caribbean' (Said, 1994[1993]:256). In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), 'the ur-text of the English novel' (Thieme, 2001:53) and 'the first West Indian novel' (Walcott, 1965:36), the trope of cannibalism is also pervasive,¹⁴ a fact especially important considering the book's 'position

¹¹ Brontë also uses the West Indies, obliquely, in *The Professor* (1846). According to Susan Meyer (1996), the character William Crimsworth likens a female student to 'a runaway West Indian slave' (61). In *Villette* (1853), Brontë again makes reference to the West Indies. In that book, M. Paul Emanuel is forced to depart for Guadeloupe and it is implied that he dies on the return journey.

¹² See, for example, Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (1986).

¹³ *The Tempest*, especially its representation of Caliban, has inspired Caribbean rewritings. According to Peter Hulme (2001), Caribbean (con)texts include George Lamming's non-fictional work *The Pleasures of Exiles* (1960) and the novel *Water with Berries* (1971) and Kamau Brathwaite's poem 'Caliban' (1969). (128-129). Also see Thomas Cartelli's 'After *The Tempest*: Shakespeare, Postcoloniality, and Michelle Cliff's New, New World Miranda' (1995).

¹⁴ See, for example, E. Pearlman's 'Robinson Crusoe and the Cannibals' (1976), Dianne Armstrong's 'The Myth of Cronus: Cannibal and Sign in Robinson Crusoe' (1992) and Minaz Jooma's 'Robinson Crusoe Inc(orporates): Domestic Economy, Incest, and the Trope of Cannibalism' (2001).

at the headwaters of the English realist tradition' (Thieme, 2001:54).¹⁵ In her evocation of the West Indies, Brontë in some sense situates herself in the (male) genealogy of English literature (by way of Shakespeare and Defoe). In subsequent Caribbean adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, including Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), one can discern a response to Brontë's text as well as a reclamation of the locale. Of course, the Caribbean is also used by Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* – it is from where the Bertrams derive part of their property.¹⁶ Although it is mentioned only 'in passing' (Said, 1994[1993]:106), Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994[1993]) draws out important imperial and colonial implications from its representation. He believes that Austen's use of the West Indies prefigures other English fiction which features the colonies, including Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (112).

The Caribbean is essential to any discussion of cannibalism,¹⁷ even though the connection between the region and the practice might at first sight seem over-determined. The word 'cannibal' can be etymologically traced back to Columbus's mislabelling of the West Indian tribe, the Caribs. Indeed, the association between the Caribbean and cannibalism is so deep-rooted that William Arens in 'Rethinking Anthropophagy' (1998) identifies 'the fifteenth-century Caribbean' as the first site of 'the cannibal tour through time' (40) and Peter Hulme (1992[1986]) goes so far as to say that cannibalism 'is the special, perhaps even defining, feature of the discourse of colonialism as it pertained to the native Caribbean' (2). The far-reaching influence of Columbus's momentary linguistic slip should not be overlooked. In traditional and colonial discourses, cannibalism has been habitually used to stereotype and de-humanise the primitive Other. Alan Rumsey (1999) writes, 'This form of "othering" has been most fully explored in its Western manifestations, as an aspect of the legitimating ideology of colonialism, missionisation, and other forms of cultural imperialism' (105).

¹⁵ *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* both provide reference points for postcolonial writers to revisit. Helen Tiffin (1989) writes, 'a mapping and dismantling of particular, canonically enshrined imperial texts constitute a major part of post-colonial writing: re-writing of *The Tempest* by writers from Australia and particularly Canada, the West Indies, and Africa; of *Robinson Crusoe* by Marcus Clarke, J. M. Coetzee, and Samuel Selvon; of *Heart of Darkness* by many writers; and perhaps most famous of all, Jean Rhys's re-writing of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*' (xx).

¹⁶ Frank Moretti (1998), however, argues that while the British colonies were 'very profitable' (24), it is likely that without them the English ruling class such as the Bertrams in *Mansfield Park* or the British economy in general (both in fiction and in reality) would have still been sustainable (24-29). He also argues that Austen's use of the West Indies is for 'strictly symbolic reasons' (27, emphasis original).

¹⁷ Not only is the Caribbean indispensable in a discussion of cannibalism, it is also very important in a study of postcolonialism. According to Carine M. Mardorossian (2005), 'That the region functions as the exemplar of the new global order explains why its literature is seen as especially representative in postcolonial studies today' (4).

According to Arens in *The Man-Eating Myth* (1979), ‘cannibal’ almost equates to ‘slave’: ‘the operational definition of cannibalism in the sixteenth century was resistance to foreign invasion followed by being sold into slavery’ (51). If a person was identified as a ‘cannibal’, it was likely that he or she would be turned into a ‘slave’.

While the colonisers justified their imperialistic expansion by highlighting the savagery of their subjects, imperialism, which led to colonialism, was itself cannibalistic. For example, Maggie Kilgour (1990) contends, ‘definition of the other as cannibal justifies its oppression, extermination, and cultural cannibalism (otherwise known as imperialism) by the rule “eat or be eaten”’ (148). By putting ‘cannibal’ and ‘cultural cannibalism’ together in such proximity, Kilgour draws attention to the affinity of the literal and metaphorical meanings of incorporation. Elsewhere, she links cannibalism and colonialism more explicitly: ‘Postcolonial studies especially have suggested that the figure of the cannibal was created to support the cultural cannibalism or colonialism, through the projection of western imperialist appetities onto the cultures they then subsumed’ (Kilgour, 2001:vii). Similarly, Eli Sagan (1974) notes that ‘imperial domination’ is one of the ‘descendents of cannibalism’ (110) and Peter Hulme (1998) agrees: imperialism is ‘itself a form of cannibalism’ (5).

The use of the West Indies in *Jane Eyre* does not in itself necessarily inspire hostile postcolonial responses from Caribbean writers. However, Brontë’s representation of the ‘all wrong creole scenes’ (Rhys, *Letters*, 262) and the underdeveloped West Indian character of Bertha, who as Marina Warner (2007[2002]) writes, is ‘a remnant of colonial power’ (156), provokes critical reactions from Rhys and others. In *Jane Eyre*, the encounter between the governess and the mad wife is pivotal to the eponymous character’s growing maturity and identity formation as well as the plot development of the novel as a whole, leading to the ‘final explosion of violence’ (Heilmann, 2009:113). The dramatic encounter between the two women recalls other versions of encounter between the ‘clothed Europe’ and the ‘naked America’ discussed by Peter Hulme in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (1992[1986]).¹⁸ *Jane Eyre*’s symbolic and substanceless representation of the West Indies also reminds one of a concern raised by Chinua Achebe regarding racism in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899); that is, the use of Africa as merely ‘setting and

¹⁸ Peter Hulme discusses five versions of ‘Europe encounters America’: Columbus and the cannibals, Prospero and Caliban, John Smith and Pocahontas, Robinson Crusoe and Friday and Inkle and Yarico (xiii).

backdrop'. Achebe (1989) believes that this practice 'eliminates the African as human factor' (12). Brontë's portrayal of the Caribbean saps the West Indies and its inhabitants of their humanity. Worse, the place is not merely denuded of its human character but is depicted as 'hellish' (Thieme, 2001:76). Thieme believes that Brontë is xenophobic (77), echoing Rhys's own complaint: 'Charlotte Brontë must have had something against the West Indies, and I was angry about it'. Rhys is particularly dismayed by the Victorian's representation of Bertha: 'Otherwise, why did she take a West Indian for that horrible lunatic, for that really dreadful creature?' and therefore Rhys sought to 'vindicate the mad woman in a novel' (qtd. in Thieme, 2001:77).¹⁹

Indeed, it is not only *Jane Eyre*'s use of the West Indies as a passing geographical setting but more importantly, its representation of the mad and 'menacingly autonomous' (Eagleton, 1988[1975]:99) Creole Bertha that is particularly significant ideologically for postcolonial Caribbean writers.²⁰ Although Bertha is not a slave herself and is instead a white Creole heiress and therefore might be assumed to have a stronger affinity with the exploiters, she nevertheless is 'made to represent the threat of irrational colonial rebellion' (Mardorossian, 2007:10) and can be seen as 'the exemplar of the colonised woman' (Gass, 2006:67). In Brontë's portrayal, Bertha's main trait is so evidently her insanity that she is now universally known as the 'mad woman in the attic', a phrase made famous by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential feminist text *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979). The title of the book makes reference to the first Mrs Rochester's confinement on the top floor of Thornfield Hall in Brontë's novel.²¹ Gilbert and Gubar list Bertha's 'madness (at Thornfield)' (339) as one of the social difficulties the heroine in *Jane Eyre* has to confront. Terry Eagleton (1988[1975]) likewise associates Bertha with Thornfield and madness: 'Thornfield means mad Bertha' (21).

¹⁹ Apparently, Brontë herself was aware of failing to portray Bertha humanely. She wrote in a letter to W.S. Williams on 4 January 1848: 'It is true that profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited by the view of such degradation, and equally true is it that I have not sufficiently dwelt on that feeling; I have erred in making *horror* too predominant' (qtd. in Thomas, 2010:45, emphasis original).

²⁰ In her article 'Shutting up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*' (1999), Carine M. Mardorossian is incredulous that 'Critics have impressively read against the grain of the husband's narrative in the novel's middle section in order to interpret the white Creole's life and identity' (1072). Although it is not true that Rhys's representation of Rochester has been completely ignored by scholars (see for example, Michael Thorpe's "'The Other Side": *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*' [1977]), critics have tended to focus on Rhys's representation of the Creole woman as the author herself repeatedly emphasised that it was Brontë's depiction of Bertha that provoked her to rewrite the Victorian text.

²¹ 'In the attic' is, however, a 'vulgar error' (Sutherland, 2008:204). According to Michael Mason, 'Bertha Rochester is locked up on the third storey of Thornfield Hall, and there is a "garret" or "attic" floor above.' (qtd. in Sutherland, 2008:204).

Although Carine M. Mardorossian (2007) contends that ‘Rochester cannot simply summon his wife’s madness as a reason for burying her alive’ in her room’ (9), insanity is nevertheless a paramount factor for her incarceration. When accused of bigamy, Rochester makes the following speech about his first wife, singling out her mental health as the primary problem in their marriage:

Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard!— as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. (*JE*)

‘[S]he came of a mad family’ suggests that Rochester assumes the madness in Bertha’s family is the result of their Creoleness.²² But it is not any type of Creoleness, but female Creoleness specifically, that is the issue, as Bertha’s madness is said to be inherited from her mother. It is significant that two Creole women in *Jane Eyre* have mental problems, especially since there are far fewer Creole characters than British ones, and the proportion of madness among them seems suggestively high. This, firstly, conforms to the Victorian perception that women in general are inherently psychologically unstable and susceptible to mental afflictions such as schizophrenia, melancholy, madness and hysteria.²³ Note, for instance, that Bertha’s brother Mr Mason, although belonging to the same family, is not said to experience the medical condition. Marianne Thormahlen (1997) believes that ‘Charlotte’s delineation of the Bertha Mason case exhibited a number of characteristic features in early nineteenth-century views on women and madness, including the component of lewdness’ (189). Secondly, and more importantly, Brontë’s representation of Bertha has become perhaps the most influential representation of gendered colonial madness in Victorian literature. According to Kathleen J. Renk in *Caribbean Shadows & Victorian Ghosts* (1999), ‘The nexus for Victorian representations of female and colonial madness, her [Bertha’s] shadowy figure typifies the Victorian madwoman and shapes our view of the colonies as places of uncontrollable rage and madness’ (88). Renk goes so far as to compare Bertha to Queen Victoria: ‘although her figure was constructed during the Victorian period, her

²² In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the character Daniel reiterates this prejudice: ‘This young Mrs Cosway is worthless and spoilt, she can’t lift a hand for herself and soon the madness that is in her, and in all these white Creoles, come out’ (60, emphasis added).

²³ Indrani Sen (2002), for example, writes that the Victorians believed ‘women were more prone to mental illness than men because of their reproductive system’ and ‘nineteenth-century science located madness as caused by female hereditary and carried by women’s bodies’ (32). Also see Jill L. Matus’s *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (1995) and Elaine Showalter’s *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985).

character, like Queen Victoria herself, extends beyond the confines of the era and attains a mythic dimension' (ibid.).

Renk believes that Anglophone Caribbean women writers are particularly fascinated by Bertha, the 'mythic madwoman' (88). Indeed, Rhys has notes how Brontë's Bertha provided the inspiration for *Wide Sargasso Sea*: 'When I read *Jane Eyre* as a child, I thought, why should she [Brontë] think Creole women are lunatics and all that? What a shame to make Rochester's first wife, Bertha, the awful madwoman, and I immediately thought I'd write the story as it might really have been. She seemed such a poor ghost. I thought I'd try to write her a life' (qtd. in Vreeland, 1979:235). Elsewhere, Rhys also remarks, 'I was vexed at her portrait of the "paper tiger" lunatic' (*Letters*, 262). Rhys's issue with *Jane Eyre*, then, is primarily the representation of the mad Creole Bertha, who is also portrayed as cannibalistic. As Susan Meyer writes in *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (1996), 'one of the deepest fears of empire', which is the horror of cannibalism, 'is evoked in *Jane Eyre* through Bertha Rochester, who has bitten, and to the physician's horror, *chewed* the shoulder of Richard Mason' (120, emphasis original).²⁴ Rhys identifies with Bertha personally and passionately and this concern is reflected in her 'autobiographical' engagement with the Victorian text in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.²⁵ She not only gives substance to the Creole scenes, thereby giving the place an enriched humanity, she also presents the history of Bertha (known as Antoinette Cosway Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea*) in Jamaica.²⁶ Rhys especially fills out Antoinette's childhood and adolescence before she becomes the mad first Mrs Rochester in *Jane Eyre* and provides an explanation for her psychosis. As the Caribbean women are often stigmatised by gendered colonial madness, Rhys's decision to contest Bertha's insanity can be read as a rebuttal to received British notions of the colony and its people.

²⁴ Bertha is also associated with cannibalism in Michelle Cliff's novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987): 'Yes, Bertha was closer the mark. Captive. Ragôt. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarron. All Bertha. All Clare' (110).

²⁵ As David Leon Higdon (1985) contends, *Wide Sargasso Sea* 'was more than a response; in many ways it was autobiographical with Rhys finding an objective correlative in Bertha Mason's sufferings' (105). Peter Hulme in 'The Locked Heart: the Creole Family Romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea*' (1994b) likewise contends that Rhys's book is 'a kind of extended autobiography or creole family romance' (76) and he argues that Rhys has incorporated her personal memory and family history/relationships in the novel. Finally, Helen Carr (1996) believes that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 'many of the details are drawn from [Rhys's] own Caribbean childhood' (21). That is to say, Rhys has put part of herself into the book and is thus in some way in communion with Brontë's text. This is similar to Tom Phillips's injection of his own biography into Mallock's *The Human Document*, as discussed in the Introduction.

²⁶ In this chapter I use 'Bertha' to refer to the character in *Jane Eyre* and 'Antoinette' for the character in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, although the two are intertwined and converge in parts of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

In a letter, Rhys explains a possible source for Brontë's portrayal of the madness of Bertha and her mother:

At that date & earlier, very wealthy planters *did* exist, their daughters *had* very large doweries, there *was* no married woman's property act. So a young man who was not too scrupulous could do very well for himself & very easily. He would marry the girl, grab her money, bring her to England – a faraway place – & in a year she would be an invalid or mad. I could see *how* easily all this could happen. [...] So the legend of the mad West Indian was established. Who would help her? By the time her relatives got to her (if they ever did) she probably *was* mad or an invalid. Or dead. (qtd. in Higdon, 1984:105, emphasis original)

In *Jane Eyre*, all we know about Bertha is that within four years of being married to Rochester she becomes 'a bad, mad, and embruted partner' (*JE*). We do not know the details of her colonial and personal background that might have led to the decline of her mental health. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys attempts to correct this incomplete portrayal by providing the circumstances behind the madness of both Annette (Antoinette's mother) and Antoinette. Annette's condition is precipitated by the loss of her estate, Coulibri, and the death of her son, Pierre; Antoinette's madness is ultimately the result of Rochester's infidelity with her servant, Amélie. John Thieme (2001) believes that Rhys's revision renders Brontë's version – that is, 'the view of Bertha/Antoinette as a raving lunatic sprung from a family of congenital idiots' – unsustainable (77). Note, however, that in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys does not reject the notion that Antoinette is afflicted but instead portrays her madness with much more sympathy and nuance. Indeed, contemporary West Indian revisions of gendered colonial madness do not necessarily seek to eradicate the association between the region and insanity altogether. Instead, they attempt to explain 'madness' in their own cultural terms and distinguish it from colonial representations. Renk (1999), for example, believes that postcolonial Caribbean reconsiderations of Victorian visions of madness 'confront and subvert pernicious nineteenth-century and colonial representations that shaped, and continue to shape, the way the Caribbean views itself and is viewed by the First World'; they show that 'madness cannot be contained by the restraints of an outdated, hegemonic discourse' (89, 120).

Although not writing about gendered madness specifically, Aimé Césaire appropriates both madness and cannibalism ('We claim kinship / with dementia praecox with the flaming madness / of persistent cannibalism'), two characteristics historically associated with the Caribbean people, to their detriment, in his redefinition of contemporary Caribbean literature.

Elizabeth J. Donaldson (2002) contends that the positive and sympathetic reception of the reconfiguration of Antoinette's mental health is in part influenced by the anti-psychiatry movement in England and America (100). Rhys's portrayal of Antoinette's madness, though, goes beyond a simple reaction to social trends to properly complicate the 'paper tiger' lunatic of *Jane Eyre*. Elizabeth Abel (1979) notes, 'Antoinette's madness may be overdetermined, but the component that derives from her relationship to Rochester is dramatised as part of an archetypal confrontation' (172) and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1998) describes Antoinette's madness as 'wholly human and insightful' (227). Rhys gives the 'poor ghost' in the Victorian novel a body (a kind of reverse cannibalism or regurgitation) and a life. In so doing, she challenges the forceful European hegemonic narrative about the Caribbean and tells the other side of the story, one that has a stronger authenticity. This postcolonial version of the narrative also reveals 'the foundations of colonial and slave society' (Wilson-Tagoe, 1998:227) largely hidden in the 'respectable' Victorian discourse of *Jane Eyre*. The reinterpretation of Creole madness in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is thus invested with huge significance: it is not merely a fictional character's medical and mental condition that is at stake but the entire colonial discourse within which a particular kind of representation of the Other is enabled and perpetuated. Such context is particularly important when the issue of colonial madness arises again in the more recent neo-Victorian novels, discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Lastly, Brontë's portrayal of characters originally from the colonies may be considered cannibalistic. In his article 'Cannibalising Indigenous Texts: Headhunting and Fantasy in Ion L. Idriess's *Coral Sea Adventures*', Robert Dixon (2001) discusses the opening chapter of Idriess's novel *Drums of Mer* (1933), which describes 'a sensational episode of ritual decapitation and cannibalism' (112). Dixon adds, 'Idriess's books about cannibalism are themselves cannibalised from a variety of other textual material, much of it ultimately taken from Islander sources' (113). Even though Brontë did not overtly use texts from the colonies in her work, her portrayal of Bertha leaves her open to the charge of cannibalising the narrative material of 'the other'. For example, as Carine M. Mardorossian points out in her article 'Unsuspecting Storyteller and Suspect Listener: A Postcolonial Reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*' (2007), in representing the suicidal Bertha, 'Brontë must have had in mind the numerous and extremely popular slave narratives that were in circulation during her lifetime' (10).

III. The cannibalising text: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

As a means of counteracting the received notions of West Indians as mad or cannibalistic, contemporary Caribbean writers have embraced both terms. Importantly, they have openly used 'cannibalism' to describe their appropriation of Western literature and myths. As the excerpt from the Introduction to Aimé Césaire's *The Collected Poetry* (1984) below shows, Francophone Caribbean writers such as Césaire, his wife Suzanne Césaire and Jean Genet have sought to reappropriate and redefine cannibalism in their writing:

Pushed to its extreme, metamorphosis could take the form of cannibalism. In response to the facile exoticism of previous Caribbean poets, Suzanne Césaire's splendid manifesto in *Tropiques* 4, January 1942, had ended with the lapidary sentence, 'Martinican poetry shall be cannibalistic or shall not be.' When a recent critic (Arnold) shows [Aimé] as 'cannibalizing' Western myths—that is giving them a countercultural twist—should we read this as a pun? Perhaps so, since Césaire himself claimed cannibalism as part of his de facto African heritage ('We claim kinship / with dementia praecox with the flaming madness / of persistent cannibalism', he wrote in the *Notebook*). It was a matter of pride instilled with the ontological necessity to assert oneself. Genet describes the same motivation in *The Blacks*, 'Let negros negrify themselves. Let them persist to the point of madness in what they're condemned to be, in their ebony, in their odor ... in their cannibal tastes.' Césaire is prompt to point out that the white man can be just as cannibalistic and with much worse reasons. The narrator of *The Notebook* fantasises that an English lady is being served a Hottentot skull in a soup tureen. In the midst of bloody political repression in Madagascar, the Ivory Coast, Indochina, and the French West Indies, Césaire castigated in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1967) 'the scene of anthropophagic hysteria' he had witnessed in the French Assembly, concluding with this apostrophe: 'Shucks, my dear colleagues, I take my hat off to you (my cannibal's hat, it goes without saying)' (Eshleman and Smith, 1983:12)

A rebellious attitude and psychology shared by Caribbean writers. They willingly and proudly associate themselves with the cannibal, 'a word of indigenous origin' (Simek, 2006:107) and a formerly racist label attached to their ancestors. This way, they simultaneously resist and confront the European myth about the Caribbean. They turn the accusation of cannibalism to their own benefit and demonstrate a self-assured identification with their West Indian heritage and sensibilities. Indeed, the term 'cannibal' plays an important role in contemporary Caribbean writers' self-assertion, in contradistinction with the European other. Eugenio D. Matibag (1991) believes that 'a number of twentieth-century Caribbean narratives have taken up the image of cannibalism that has been handed down in Caribbean discourse and turned it into a trope of identity and a literary mechanism of self-individuation' ('Self-consuming Fiction'). Caribbean writers also use the figure of the

cannibal, along with that of the ghost, to ‘reimagine their European literary ancestry’ (Huggan, 2008:166). Some Caribbean authors are even comfortable with reappropriating the notion of the cannibal to describe their approach to writing, seen in Maryse Condé’s description of her appropriation of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* in *Windward Heights* (1995): ‘There is a strong tradition of what is called literary cannibalism in the Caribbean. A lot of people have done it before me’ (1999).²⁷ ‘Cannibalism’ reconfigured by Caribbean writers in this way emphasises the potential of creative hybridity.

Rhys’s works, particularly *Wide Sargasso Sea*, can be seen within this tradition of Caribbean literary cannibalism. Rhys writes explicitly about cannibalistic Caribs in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) (Matibag, ‘Self-consuming Fiction’), and may also be knowingly evoking the notion of cannibalism to perplex and mock European expectations and condescension in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In one scene in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Rochester character (who is never named in the book) describes the room of Christophine, Antoinette’s nurse: ‘Yet one day when I was waiting there I was suddenly very much afraid. [...] I was certain that hidden in the room [...] there was a dead man’s dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly’ (26). The ‘dead man’s dried hand’, alongside the chicken, suggests some unspeakable practices involving some form of preparation or consumption of

²⁷ After *Windward Heights*, Maryse Condé has continued to explore the relationship between Caribbean literature and cannibalism. In 2003, she gave a seminar entitled ‘Cannibalism and Caribbean Literature’ at Princeton University and wrote the novel *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (*The Story of the Cannibal Woman*). A collection of colloquium papers, *Feasting on Words: Maryse Condé, Cannibalism, and the Caribbean Text* (2006) is devoted to *Histoire de la femme cannibale* specifically and Condé’s ‘provocative approach to writing of the French Caribbean’ (Broichhagen et al., vii) generally.

Condé shares a literary heritage with Rhys: they both rewrite texts by British female authors, and those by sisters at that. It is additionally significant that the Brontës first wrote under male pseudonyms in a predominantly male-centred literary world (‘Currer Bell’ and ‘Ellis Bell’ are Charlotte Brontë’s and Emily Brontë’s pseudonyms respectively), and that the first Caribbean female writers also wrote in an environment that was, at least at first, male-oriented. It is therefore appropriate that Condé and Rhys have drawn inspiration from Charlotte and Emily Brontë. According to Patsy Stoneman in *Brontë Transformations* (1996), many women novelists of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century wrote ‘critical or biographical commentaries on the Brontës’ (78). In their fictional responses to the sisters’ novels, both Condé and Rhys follow their literary forebears in ‘coming to terms with the Brontës’ (ibid.).

Considering their aesthetic and biographical affinities, it is perhaps unsurprising that some scholars have studied their work in tandem. Although Maryse Condé’s *Windward Heights* was originally written in French (*La migration des coeurs*) in 1995 and translated into English by Richard Philcox (Condé’s husband) in 1998, the book is often discussed with Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*. For example, Melody Boyd Carrière’s PhD thesis *Displacement and the Text* (2007) discusses Caribbean and Italian women writers writing in a tradition that regards them as ‘Other’, using both *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Windward Heights*, among other works, as primary sources. Emily Taylor Meyers’s PhD thesis *Transnational Romance: The Politics of Desire in Caribbean Novels by Women* (2009) again employs Rhys’s and Condé’s novels to discuss how the Caribbean women writers rewrite the romance to explore issues related to sexual politics. Lastly, Carine M. Mardorossian in *Reclaiming Difference: Caribbean Women Rewrite Postcolonialism* (2005) studies novels including those by Rhys and Condé to reconsider the idea of ‘difference’ in a variety of contexts geographical, sexual and racial.

the human body. That Christophine practices obeah may explain the presence of these horrific objects in her room but there is also an undeniable sublimated fear of cannibalism. Rhys is ironising Rochester, as in the narrative he is constantly shown to harbour irrational fears about the Caribbean which might be part of this prejudice. Indeed, the passage does not establish that the dried hand, chicken feathers and a slit chicken are in the room, only that Rochester is convinced they are. They are ‘hidden’, not found or shown to exist. There is a hint that he identifies with the owner of the ‘dried hand’, placed together with ‘white’ and ‘cock’ in the sentence, images associated with the only white male character in the scene. If indeed Rhys uses this description to mock Rochester’s fear of the Other’s cultural practices, be it obeah or cannibalism, she knowingly relies on the stereotypical representation of the ‘savage’ to paint Rochester’s paranoia at the same time.

Rhys’s consumption of Brontë’s text also fits into a more general female reading tradition. The foundational text of neo-Victorian fiction overtly revisiting a work by a Victorian female author reminds us that the nineteenth century is ‘the first era in which female authorship was no longer in some sense anomalous’ (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000[1979]:xi). Gilbert and Gubar argue that ‘for English-speaking women, there are not a number of different, nationally defined nineteenth centuries; there is only one—which contains and sustains the achievements of British and American women writers’ (xxxix) and that every *femme moyenne intellectuelle*, to use their expression, spent her childhood ‘avidly *devouring* the classics of the female imagination produced by Austen and the Brontës, Mary Shelley and George Eliot, and yes, if the girl liked poetry, Emily Dickinson’ (xxvii, emphasis added). Gilbert and Gubar’s homogenising description of a female subject’s reading experience which disregards her nationality, geopolitical background and racial makeup can be applied to Rhys.²⁸ As Joanne Gass (2006) comments, Rhys ‘was steeped in the English literary canon’ (63). Her *Wide Sargasso Sea*, then, can be viewed as indicative of the *devouring* of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in both Gilbert and Gubar’s sense and in the sense of the Caribbean tradition of literary cannibalism. Interestingly, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys writes about ‘some shabby brown

²⁸ That writers from different geographical, national and racial backgrounds all looked to the same sources for inspiration is relevant to my argument that Victorian authors act more like ‘mythic’ rather than ‘familial’ literary ancestors to contemporary writers. Also, in terms of myth-making, Charlotte and Emily Brontë and their novels have attained a ‘mythic’ and ‘mystic’ status. Patsy Stoneman (1996), for example, believes that famous texts such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* have taken on a character ‘rather like that of a fairytale, which we might describe as mythological’ (4). Lucasta Miller in *The Brontë Myth* (2001) also writes, ‘the Brontë story had been retold so many times and in so many forms that through sheer force of repetition it had shifted from the level of history to that of myth’ (140).

volumes' of English books having been 'eaten away' (63) in the West Indies. This detail is not only intended to show the exotic tropical weather but also to provide an unsettling image of English literature disintegrating in the colonies.

Wide Sargasso Sea's textual cannibalism of *Jane Eyre* is selective. Despite digesting numerous narrative elements and images from the Victorian text and the fact that the third part of Rhys's novel is set in *Jane Eyre*'s Thornfield Hall, the Caribbean novel only incorporates a small group of characters from the original (such as Bertha, Rochester and Grace Poole) and does not focus on Jane's substantial history. (Rhys instead introduces new indigenous characters such as Christophine, Amélie and Daniel Cosway.) Rhys primarily cannibalises the 'nutritious' parts of *Jane Eyre*, those necessary to the production of distinctive and relevant Caribbean elements. She supplies a history for Brontë's silenced and misunderstood Creole character, Bertha Mason. Rhys's text, then, interrupts and intervenes its source, rips it up aggressively and dominates it but not to the extent of deviating from the narrative altogether. Thus, she ultimately submits to Brontë's authoritative influence in her attempt to give a voice and an expanded history to Antoinette. The Caribbean author wrote with Brontë's version in mind and even used *The First Mrs Rochester* as the book's working title for a while (Thieme, 2001:99). Describing the writing of the novel, Rhys even expressed the deference she felt towards the original: 'I began to feel that Charlotte Brontë was angry with me for tampering with her novel' (qtd. in Angier, 1992:476). So, instead of giving Antoinette an alternate and better life, Rhys conforms to the destiny set out for her in *Jane Eyre* and reuses the ending from Brontë's text as a preordained finishing line. Most significantly, in both the original and Rhys's prequel, Bertha becomes mad and is subsequently consumed in the Thornfield fire. Rhys to a certain extent accepts Brontë's version of events, even while providing a much more nuanced and humane characterisation of Antoinette.

What does this say about the relationship between *Wide Sargasso Sea* and its pre-text? David Leon Higdon (1985) writes that '*Wide Sargasso Sea* is no parasite work sucking life to sustain itself from the Brontë's novel' (112),²⁹ possibly in reaction to a critical view that postcolonial adaptations are often considered parasitic. For example, Chantal Zabus (1985),

²⁹ Interestingly, in *Jane Eyre*, the vampiric quality of Bertha is alluded to several times., Richard Mason describing Bertha in the following terms: 'She sucked the blood: she said she'd drain my heart'.

for instance, believes that postcolonial rewritings of ‘Old World literature of colonisation’ are at their worst ‘sheer parasitism’ (84). That Higdon evokes the language of vampirism (‘sucking life’) in his description of the relationship between Rhys’s and Brontë’s novels is revealing, even if the image is conjured only to be immediately laid to rest. But it is hard *not* to see Rhys’s text in vampiric and cannibalistic terms, as the narrative of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is essentially subordinated to *Jane Eyre*. As Michael Thorpe (1999) comments, ‘it would be foolish to deny that many readers come to [*Wide Sargasso Sea*] with some recollection of *Jane Eyre* and that Rhys relied in a general way on their doing so’ (99-100). Thomas F. Staley (1979) likewise remarks, ‘the reader’s knowledge of *Jane Eyre* is fundamental to an appreciation of *Wide Sargasso Sea*’ (119). In a letter, Rhys writes that ‘It might be possible to unhitch the whole thing from Charlotte Brontë’s novel, but I don’t want to do that. It is that particular Creole I want to write about, not any of the other mad Creoles’ (*Letters*, 153). Here, she admits her reluctance to untangle her work from Brontë’s novel and indeed *Wide Sargasso Sea* relies on *Jane Eyre* for its sustenance and existence. Rhys also confesses that she read *Jane Eyre* too much, to the extent that ‘I found it was creeping into my writing’ (*Letters*, 161).³⁰ This quote highlights her passivity and suggests the cannibalism is somewhat involuntary. In some sense this seems disingenuous: Rhys has chosen to rewrite *Jane Eyre* and so the presence of the Victorian text in her work must be seen as much a deliberate act of textual cannibalism as a case of having been overpowered and consumed by the mother text.

In some sense *Jane Eyre* has also consumed *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as the later book perpetuates the original story. *Wide Sargasso Sea* cannot entirely escape its pre-text or by extension, British imperialism: the rewriting of British texts is a further continuation of the colonising process. Here we see that postcolonial neo-Victorian writing is both cannibalised and cannibalising; *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* are engaged in a simultaneous communion. If *Jane Eyre* is inside *Wide Sargasso Sea* (for Rhys, it ‘creeps’ into her book), *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also now inside *Jane Eyre*. In a discussion of postrealist fiction, Eileen Williams-Wanquet (2006) writes that Rhys’s re-writing is close to Brontë’s original, so much so that *Wide Sargasso sea* is ‘actually situated inside it’ and is ‘finally swallowed up by another text [*Jane Eyre*] situated in the past’ (406, 412). Although Williams-Wanquet refers to the novels’

³⁰ In her discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Sylvie Maurel (1998) identifies moments of *Jane Eyre*’s ‘creeping into’ Rhys’s novel, singling out Rhys’s use of the verb ‘to bewitch’ and her ‘verbatim quotation’ from Brontë’s text (135-6).

common timeframe and the conflation between past, present and future in the two works, her remarks on temporality can be applied to the understanding of the general relationship between *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*: they are inside one another, sharing one body, nourishing and completing the other.

It would be ideologically and morally conflicting if Rhys *did* indeed consider her work unparasitic and completely independent of the Victorian novel. Said (1994[1993]) argues that ‘The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them’ (xiii). Rhys’s attempt to narrate the story of Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* blocks the narration of the second Mrs Rochester, who is reduced to a marginal character and only appears, cameo-like, in the last part of the book. Rhys’s version must be read as an integral part of and therefore in full communion with *Jane Eyre*, otherwise Rhys would be following a similar pattern of narrative imperialism as in Brontë’s text; that is, one woman’s subjectivity gained at the expense of another’s, a pattern which Rhys openly opposes and painstakingly remedies in her own text. She cannot on the one hand take issue with Bertha’s maltreatment and ‘ghostly’ representation in the colonial *Jane Eyre* and turn another woman, the governess-bride, into a British ghost in the Caribbean *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys believes that Brontë’s novel tells ‘only one side—the English side’ of the story and that white West Indians also ‘have a side and a point of view’ (*Letters*, 297). Yet if, as it is my belief, Rhys intends to provide the ‘whole’, or at least a wider, picture, then her book must be read in conjunction with the Victorian original. Here, we see a candid example of neo-Victorian desire for communion with the past – Rhys’s story cannot be fully realised without the accompaniment of the original.

Despite this total communion, *Wide Sargasso Sea* has not been subsumed by its ur-text. Instead, Rhys’s novel has given itself a new identity and existence. As such, it provides a clear example of the other motivation for neo-Victorian cannibalism of the past: the impulse to distinguish oneself from the earlier work. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys offers a deeper and more sympathetic view of the Caribbean and fills out Antoinette’s identity, acts which seek to rectify perceived limitations in the original. She also provides a template and a new reference for later imitators. Sylvie Maruel (1998), using the language of Bloomian theory of influence, contends that Rhys ‘swerves away from the reading of woman that is reflected in *Jane Eyre*,

in such a radical way that she makes *Wide Sargasso Sea* appear as an unprecedentedly original work' (139). It is perhaps hyperbolic to claim that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is 'unprecedentedly original', as its borrowed elements and historical influences are patent. But something original does emerge from Rhys's book. But something original does emerge from Rhys's book. It prefigures postcolonial criticism, as Cora Kaplan (2007) notes, 'Written two decades before postcolonial scholars had turned their attention to the politics of race and empire in Brontë's canonical novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* provocatively introduced those questions about sexuality and empire' (154). Rhys's text also originated a new novelistic trend – the neo-Victorian. Christian Gutleben (2001) gives Rhys's text its due: 'When Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966 out of a deeply-felt personal, ethical and cultural sense of injustice, she probably little thought that *she was starting a new literary movement* whose very essence consisted in re-thinking and rewriting Victorian myths and stories' (5, emphasis added) and that the book 'may be said to have started the literary movement of Victorian postmodernism' (35). The theory of neo-Victorian cannibalism; that is, that the novels in the genre are each a unique product of the negotiation between a desire for communion with the Victorian and for creating an individuated identity, is best illustrated by *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which a Victorian novel is cannibalised and a new identity, a new genre in this case, emerges in the process.

IV. Cannibalising *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Three neo-Victorian rejoinders

Wide Sargasso Sea's foundational position in the neo-Victorian genre has made it canonical but also a catalyst for contention. It has, most significantly, altered the interpretation of its Victorian pre-text, *Jane Eyre*. Robert Young (1990) believes that 'today it has become hard to think about *Jane Eyre* without Rhys' *The Wide Sargasso Sea* [sic]' (166). Carine M. Mardorossian (1998) likewise writes, 'interpretations of *Jane Eyre* will simply never be the same after and because of *Wide Sargasso Sea*' (20). This interconnected relationship between Brontë and Rhys are also paired up in university syllabi: '*Wide Sargasso Sea* almost always appears alongside *Jane Eyre*, the postcolonial "vindication" read after and against one of the novels which forms the imperialist canon' (Hulme, 1998:72). More importantly for the present discussion, contemporary texts that revisit *Jane Eyre* often need to consider not only the original text but also *Wide Sargasso Sea*. What happens when there is not one but two literary predecessors to wrestle with simultaneously? This section looks at a recent group of

Anglo-American neo-Victorian novels that cannibalise both Brontë's and Rhys's novels and discusses the implications of their ultimate choice of allegiance.³¹

Lin Haire-Sargeant's *H: The Story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights* (1992), D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000) and Emma Tennant's *Adèle: Jane Eyre's Hidden Story* (2002) cannibalise two canonical works: the Victorian *Jane Eyre* and the postcolonial *Wide Sargasso Sea*.³² Although taking inspiration from both novels, they have consciously returned to Brontë's version and thereby seek communion with the 'original' totem instead of the replica. This is evident in their reorientation of the narrative focus away from the Creole Bertha in Rhys's text to the primarily British characters in *Jane Eyre*, as well as the novels' endorsement and repetition of Brontë's portrayal of the first Mrs Rochester as a mad character. The return to the depiction of Bertha as a savage subverts her empowerment in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and annihilates the more nuanced character Rhys provided. Each of the three novels demonstrates knowledge of the representation of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea* – her treatment in these works is not innocent or merely accidental. Although some early feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar do not read Bertha's West Indian origin from a postcolonial angle, and instead stress her narrative function as Jane's 'truest and darkest double' and 'mad double' (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000[1979]:360, 368), Bertha's embodiment of *Jane Eyre*'s ideology of imperialism can no longer be disregarded. Just as Prospero is now perceived as 'the white imperialist' and Caliban 'the ugly savage' in critical analyses and appropriations, as if these fictional characters were 'guilty' (Walcott, 1965:36), it is now impossible not to read Bertha as an interpretive touchstone in a colonial context. Susan Meyer (1990) points out that 'An

³¹ Putting British and American writers together here is by no means an attempt to evade America's own colonial past. Rather, it is to emphasise a close linguistic and cultural affinity between texts from those countries than exists in work produced elsewhere.

The cannibalism of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not restricted to Anglo-American works. In 'The Autobiography of My Mother: Jamaica Kincaid's Revision of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*' (2006), Joanne Gass discusses the relationship between Kincaid's novel and Brontë's and Rhys's. She contends that *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1995) 'hybridises' *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* 'in order to subvert their colonialist repression of the voices of the originally repressed Caribs' (65). Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (2002) also writes that the Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferré 'establishes a thematic link to Jean Rhys – and through her to Charlotte Brontë – that underscores the importance to her work of recognising a female tradition' (253).

³² Haire-Sargeant is an Associate Professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design and has written academic work on *Wuthering Heights*; D.M. Thomas is a British novelist, whose most famous book is *The White Hotel*, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1981; lastly, Emma Tennant is also a British novelist, known for her reworkings of classic stories, a number of which are neo-Victorian.

All three neo-Victorian writers use the names of characters from the Brontës' novels in their book titles, signalling explicitly the intertextual relationship between their books and their canonical models, an approach similar to the reworkings of *Dracula* which incorporate the name of the original novel in theirs.

interpretation of the significance of the British empire in *Jane Eyre* must begin by making sense of Bertha Mason Rochester' (252). Indeed, in contemporary works, how the character Bertha is treated is indicative of the texts' relative concern with the issues of imperialism and racial oppression. Also, the treatment of Bertha in the contemporary novels, due to their references to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is very much a response to Rhys's representation, particularly its postcolonial critique of empire.

The re-centring of the British characters is also seen in the texts' representation of the 'orphan' or 'bastard' character. According to Kathleen J. Renk (1999), 'the ideal nineteenth-century middle-class English family acquired a mythological connotation' (7) and John K. Walton in 'Home and Leisure' (2001) comments, 'one of the key themes running through the contemporary representation of Victorian Britain was the family, as icon of morality, respectability, security and comfort' (51). It is unsurprising, then, that postcolonial works, which often aim at challenging and destabilising established ideals of empire, feature dysfunctional families so prominently. As John Thieme notes in *Postcolonial Con-texts* (2001), 'Orphans and bastards abound in postcolonial texts and the engagement with issues of parentage is often as intense as in, say, a Fielding novel where the social order can be reaffirmed by the revelation that the picaresque hero of uncertain birth is really a gentleman' (8). The use of the orphan or bastard character in postcolonial texts is poignant and harkens back to Victorian literature, in which such figures abound. *Jane Eyre* is no exception. Orphanhood is, according to Gilbert and Gubar (2000[1979]), a 'female reality' in the novel (340). At one point, Bessie, the nurse, sings to the young Jane: 'Over the path of the poor orphan child [...] Take to His bosom the poor orphan child' (*JE*). And Jane herself says, 'I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters' (*JE*). However, while the characters' attempts to reunite with their parents are often rewarded or find happy endings in Victorian texts (think, for example, Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*), Thieme observes that postcolonial texts 'seldom, if ever, offer such comfortable resolutions' (8). This type of frustrated quest mirrors 'the severing of the bloodlines from the supposed colonial father' and 'attest[s] to the positive potential latent in the roles of bastard and orphan' (8). Similarly, Cora Kaplan (2007) writes about 'banishing the Victorian happy ending' as an 'effective narrative strategy for dispersing the long shadow that the imperial imagination cast on colonisers and colonised' (154) and Kathleen J. Renk believes that narratives by Caribbean women writers serve to subvert the 'myth' of the Victorian family (10). If the bastard's and orphan's failed attempts to reunite

with their parents in postcolonial texts can be seen as a metaphor for a rupture between the colonial ‘parent’ and colonised ‘child’, then the neo-Victorian novels under consideration offer a counter response. The orphans or bastards in these texts, *all* fathered by the European male, Rochester, successfully reconnect with their biological parents or find a satisfactory alternate family, thereby rebuilding the traditional social unit and returning to Victorian literary tropes. In this development, Bertha herself is seen as a possible parent (and she is indeed the parent in *H.—* and *The Final Journey*), albeit a possibility dismissed in the end once the Creole woman’s narrative function is fulfilled. That is to say, some form of ‘family’ is reconstructed in these texts *at the expense* of Bertha.

In *H.—*, *The Final Journey* and *Adèle*, Bertha reprises her role in the Victorian original as the mad woman on the third floor of Thornfield Hall who must be removed from the narratives so that she does not hinder other characters’ pursuit of romantic or familial happiness. That the British characters in these texts survive Bertha is a Britocentric re-enactment of the Victorian text and is significant ideologically. According to Susan Meyer in *Imperialism At Home* (1996), Bertha’s death at the close of *Jane Eyre* ‘reveals an uneasiness about the dehumanising figurative use to which it has put people of non-white races’ (26). Some critics also infer that Bertha’s demise ‘constitutes a denial of her subjectivity’ (Mardorossian, 2006:27). This ending is reiterated in the group of neo-Victorian novels under discussion, albeit with some alterations to the events leading up to it. They can therefore be said to repeat to some extent the ideology in Brontë’s text. Mardorossian (2006) points out that ‘The moment Christophine, the most resilient black character in *Wide Sargasso Sea* stands up to Rochester, she has to leave the narrative field altogether’ (13) and uses this as an example of how “‘coming to voice” in the face of authority results in the speaker losing rather than gaining power’ (ibid.). Bertha in the contemporary texts also has to ‘leave the narrative field altogether’ due to her death. Her absence points to her ultimate loss of power and reaffirms the position of the British characters, and by extension, the British empire.

i. H: The Story of Heathcliff’s Journey Back to Wuthering Heights (1992)

In Lin Haire-Sargeant’s *H: The Story of Heathcliff’s Journey Back to Wuthering Heights* (hereafter *H.—*) – a text which incorporates elements from Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*,

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*³³ and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* – Mr Are (the Rochester character) describes Bertha:

Behold Bertha Mason Are, the Creole, the wanton [...] I was tricked into marrying her when I was younger than you, and only discovered my mistake when it was too late. All her line is fatally infected with a pernicious madness, a madness that seems reason, but would have the world other than what it is, and strives to seduce others to a like delusion (260).

Mr Are's words are remarkably reminiscent of Rochester's description of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, quoted previously, which also emphasises the madness running through her family: 'idiots and maniacs through three generations!' (JE). Haire-Sargeant is familiar with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a fact indicated by her referencing Rhys's book at least twice in *H.—*. The first is Antoinette's parrot, 'Coco', which is entirely Rhys's invention. The figure of the mocking parrot in *Wide Sargasso Sea* bears meaningful symbolism in the context of Caribbean literature. According to Graham Huggan (1994), 'parrots serve a crucial function in several Caribbean texts as metaphors for the process of colonial mimicry' (643) and that 'the death of the parrot in Rhys's novel is made, starkly, to simulate the death of Bertha Mason in Brontë's nineteenth-century classic *Jane Eyre*' (651). In *H.—*, the parrot reappears carrying new symbolic meaning: 'It was a parrot, such as sailors bring back from the Indies, said to outlive man and equal him in dexterity of tongues' (250). In a sense, Haire-Sargeant's text parrots *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*, the bird providing a knowing comment about the relationship between neo-Victorian and Victorian literature. Another reference to *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Haire-Sargeant's novel has to do with naming. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's full name is 'Bertha Antoinetta Mason' but she is mostly referred to as 'Bertha' or 'Bertha Mason'. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys memorably makes 'Antoinette' (a name which Rochester never uses to refer to his wife in *Jane Eyre*) Bertha's original name, while 'Bertha'

³³ Another West Indian novel, V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas* (1975), which Grace Moore (2008) believes follows Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (139), also amalgamates elements from both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. It 'alludes explicitly to *Jane Eyre* by naming two of its central characters Roche and Jane, and expands the allusion to Emily Brontë through its location in a commune named Thrushcross Grange' (Innes, 2007:54). Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother* might have been inspired by both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* as well (see fn. 31). Also, according to John Thieme (2001), Canadian Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1976) 'contains incidental allusions to *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*' (73). Finally, William Faulkner's *Absolam, Absolam!* (1936) draws on both *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. When he was a young man, the protagonist Thomas Sutpen worked as an overseer in the Caribbean. He married the wealthy daughter of a planter and had a son, Charles Bon, but repudiated the marriage when he learnt that the woman was of mixed race. He then returns to start another plantation in Mississippi and has a son and a daughter, Henry and Judith. The son from the first marriage, however, comes to Mississippi and establishes himself as the best friend of Henry and the suitor for Judith. Sutpen's marriage to the mixed-race first wife is reminiscent of Rochester's to Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, while the incestuous love between Charles and Judith recalls Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*.

is a name forced on her by her brutish husband. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette complains about this unnamings and renaming, which she thinks deprives her of the essence of her identity: 'Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes and her looking-glass' (147). In *H.—*, Bertha responds to Mr Are's calling her 'Bertha' with indignation: 'What name is that? [...] It is not mine; it never was. Why do you persist in applying it to me?' (259). In this instant, Antoinette in *H.—* and Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are conflated – they both reject the name 'Bertha'. From the use of the parrot and character names, it is undeniable that Haire-Sargeant knows about the history Rhys has created for Antoinette, yet it is Brontë's version of the character she chooses to evoke. In her book, Mr Are opines, 'It is part of her delusion to deny her name' (259). Mr Are's remark, ostensibly on Bertha's troubled mental state, can be read as an underhanded comment on Rhys's own forceful renaming of 'Bertha' to 'Antoinette' in *Wide Sargasso Sea* – the delusion is as much the character's as her author's. Names matter, as Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* heartbreakingly relates. And in the issue of naming, Haire-Sargeant endorses Brontë's version over Rhys'.

Although *H.—* shows a stronger affinity with *Jane Eyre* than with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, there is one significant difference between Haire-Sargeant's Bertha and both Brontë's and Rhys's versions. In *H.—*, Bertha has a son with Rochester; their son is Heathcliff from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.³⁴ It is interesting to note that Bertha is killed off promptly after she is revealed to be Heathcliff's mother. In fact, she is murdered by Heathcliff when she herself tries to kill him. In *Great Expectations*, Magwitch, Pip's father figure, is killed so that the young man can lead a normal life in London and Heathcliff's matricide serves a similar purpose – the killing of a parent with colonial baggage. The removal of Bertha from *H.—*'s narrative is of course a fulfillment of her fate in *Jane Eyre*, but it also reorients the focus to the central characters in not one but *two* Victorian novels. Heathcliff's mysterious origin in *Wuthering Heights* finds 'explanation' in *H.—*. He is no orphan after all but is the legitimate son of Mr Are and Bertha. This interpretation – that Heathcliff has some West Indian connection in his origin – perhaps is not that far-fetched, as his Creoleness has been remarked

³⁴ Perhaps Haire-Sargeant's book is in some sense a response to Rhys's following take on the reception of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*: 'I wonder why people are so *Jane Eyre* conscious? And why *Wuthering Heights* is neglected? I suspect it's because Rochester is white-washed – the cruel devil. Heathcliff is not' (qtd. in Higdon, 1985:109-110). Elsewhere, Elaine Savory (1998) writes, 'Rhys thought of her idea of Rochester as connected to Emily Brontë's character Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* but the Gothic intensity of Heathcliff is far from the mundane emotional limitations of Rhys's Rochester' (254).

upon by critics. For example, Terry Eagleton (1995) believes that Heathcliff may be a Creole, ‘like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*’ (3) – a comparison prefiguring Haire-Sargeant’s approach to the two fictional characters. John Thieme (2001) also comments that in *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff’s ‘gibberish that nobody could understand’ might mean that one of his possible identities is ‘a Caribbean Creole’ (75).³⁵ However, instead of allowing for a happy family reunion, Bertha is dispensed with in *H.—* and in the end, Jane and Mr Are provide money for Heathcliff and Catherine to migrate to Louisiana in America to start a new life. Although Haire-Sargeant’s Heathcliff who has Creole blood lives on, his survival depends on the murder of another Creole, Bertha. *H.—*, the child of narrative incest between two sisterly Victorian novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, ultimately exorcises *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

ii. *Charlotte Brontë: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000)

In D.M. Thomas’s *Charlotte Brontë: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (hereafter *Final Journey*), we see a more compassionate interpretation of Bertha. The contemporary protagonist Miranda Stevenson, a ‘narrowly-based’ Brontë scholar teaching in a ‘third-rate poly’ (109),³⁶ forges a sequel to *Jane Eyre* and presents it as ‘Charlotte’s own alternative ending’ (151). The inclusion of the faked manuscript provides a self-reflexive comment on the fact that in some sense all neo-Victorian novelists are literary forgers or even plagiarists. In the fictional sequel to *Jane Eyre*, Thomas has Stevenson copy verbatim, in other words, cannibalise, some sections of the last chapter of the original novel. In Stevenson’s version, Bertha is referred to as ‘mad wife’ (32), ‘wretched creature’ (32), ‘poor mad wife’ (61), ‘a depraved, violent madwoman’ (62) and other similarly derogatory terms pointing to her mental instability and violence. Apparently, then, we are presented with a mad Bertha not unlike her counterpart in *Jane Eyre*. But Thomas’s representation is slightly more nuanced. Grace Poole, a servant employed to look after Bertha and keep her a secret from outsiders, views the Creole woman in sympathetic terms. For example, at one point, Grace says to Jane: ‘Bertha was not always mad. Sometimes she’d be quite sane, quite like you and me, for weeks on end; and in those times she could be good company. She got much worse in the last

³⁵ It has also been speculated that Heathcliff’s three-year absence in *Wuthering Heights* is spent in the West Indies, an interpretation adopted by Emma Tennant in her neo-Victorian novel *Heathcliff’s Tale* (2005), although Susan Meyer’s (1996) discussion of Heathcliff as fighting in the American Revolutionary War is perhaps more convincing (114-116). Jeffrey Caine’s *Heathcliff* (1977) also explores the story of the eponymous hero’s missing years in Emily Brontë’s novel, this time in London.

³⁶ Miranda Stevenson is one of many academic characters in neo-Victorian fiction. See Chapter Four ‘Academic Cannibals’ for an extended discussion on the subject.

year or so. Until then, she never got free or attacked anybody' (62). This kinder description of Bertha reflects contemporary perceptions of women and race which Thomas has added to the Victorian original. He has also incorporated the narrative history of Antoinette from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which provides an explanation for Bertha's gradual descent into madness.

Still, the representation of Bertha in *Final Journey* conforms by and large to Brontë's version rather than Rhys's – the Creole woman's most obvious trait is her madness and as in *Jane Eyre* she dies before the end of the story. This portrayal is potentially problematic since, in the novel, Thomas makes it clear that Stevenson has reread *Wide Sargasso Sea* when researching her sequel to *Jane Eyre* (85), and while describing her talk on Charlotte Brontë, Stevenson remarks that she 'paid graceful tribute to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as a brilliant exploration of Bertha' (119). These details reveal the character's and author's knowledge of and admiration for *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in particular, Rhys's portrayal of Bertha. Yet, despite these explicit acknowledgements of the Caribbean intertext, and Thomas's use of the West Indies as a setting in both the main text of *Final Journey* and in Stevenson's sequel, we see that he has not fully embraced Rhys's 'brilliant exploration of Bertha'. Instead, as Christian Gutleben (2002) writes, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is 'exploited and played with' (15). Through Stevenson, Thomas may be deliberately representing a kind of disingenuous academic who mouths 'fashionable' ideologies in public but either consciously or unconsciously turns her back to them in private.

In Thomas's continuation of *Jane Eyre* as told through Stevenson, Jane learns that Rochester and Bertha have a son, Robert Rochester, whose complexion is black despite his father being indigenously English. Stevenson writes that 'everyone knew of cases where the black blood came up again, thirty, forty years later...' (164). Robert's skin colour is a sign of the persistent and unconcealable influence of colonialism. By the time that Robert's parentage is revealed, both Rochester and Bertha are already dead, leaving the young man an orphan. Thomas gives Robert a new family, this time a happy one. He forms a satisfactory union with Jane and they live 'as man and wife' (171) in the Caribbean. This representation is subversive on at least three levels. Firstly, the couple cohabit but never become legally married. Secondly, their relationship can arguably be interpreted as incestuous, as Jane is to some extent Robert's mother, having formerly been married to his father. Thirdly, Thomas deliberately reverses the values of the Victorian original. In Brontë's text, Creole sensual excess, personified by

Bertha, is ridiculed and rejected but in *Final Journey* it is rendered as something pleasant and embraced. Also, while the marriage in *Jane Eyre* between an Englishman and a Creole wife is portrayed as disharmonious and dangerous, in Thomas's version the decidedly un-Victorian union between an English woman and a Creole man – Gutleben calls Robert 'a lusty black Creole' (2001:201) – is not only tolerated but celebrated. Finally, in Thomas's novel, Jane, an English woman, moves to the Caribbean, where she lives as 'man and wife' without 'any sense of sin' with a Creole man, a characteristically twenty-first-century living arrangement which overturns Victorian gender conventions and expectations.

In *Final Journey*, Thomas both pays homage to and parodies his two predecessors – Brontë and Rhys. Yet, ultimately, although his book challenges certain Victorian ideologies, he aligns himself more with his Victorian literary ancestor than with Rhys, an identification most clearly evident in his character Stevenson, who writes *as* the Victorian author and adopts *Jane Eyre* as her primary referent. Also, when falsely addressed as 'Madam Brontë' by a Martinique girl on her arrival to the island, Stevenson makes no attempt to correct her mistake, indicating that she is happy to be thought of as 'some London *professor* by the name of Charlotte Brontë [...] lecturing on some novelist Miranda Stevenson' (77, emphasis original). Stevenson's desire to be identified with her literary model is further shown in her signing as 'Charlotte Brontë' at the hotel (69) and in her appropriation of the Victorian writer's name in public. For example, when asked her name by a waiter, Stevenson responds, 'Charlotte. Charlotte Brontë' (76). That is to say, the academic cannibalises Brontë's identity in much of the contemporary section of the novel. By making his character write *as* and identify herself with a famous Victorian author, Thomas may be projecting his own desire to be associated with Brontë onto Stevenson. This is somewhat reminiscent of Gaynor Arnold's use of Dorothea Gibson (Catherine Dickens) as her husband's mouthpiece in *Girl in a Blue Dress*, discussed in Chapter One.

Thomas's closer affinity with the Victorian text over the Caribbean one is additionally exemplified in his reorientation of the narrative focus away from the subaltern Bertha, who is central to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to the British characters. Following Brontë's example, Thomas uses *Jane Eyre* as the first-person narrator, while Grace Poole, Bertha's English caretaker, is given a more fleshed out background. Thomas also returns to a Victorian-style happy ending which features a kind of family. In his book, Jane, like her original in Brontë's novel, finds

connubial bliss, even though this relationship is fleeting (Jane dies of fever only a few months into their life together) and the union is much more inclusive. While Thomas's representation of the relationship between Robert and Jane can be seen as a celebration of exoticism, tolerance and liberation, as opposed to puritanical nineteenth-century mores, he still follows and reverts to some of the basic elements of the Victorian original.

What is especially problematic in Thomas's revision of the two pre-texts is his portrayal of Bertha. To begin with, his representation of Bertha and Jane in his supposedly liberated Victorian narrative sidesteps and even trivialises the violent consequences of imperialism, which are subtextually present in *Jane Eyre* and explicitly explored in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As Christian Gutleben (2002) writes, 'religious and imperialistic values are rejected [in *Final Journey*] and what is celebrated is exotic sensuality' (15). Beyond this, despite Stevenson's open acknowledgement and appreciation for Rhys' representation of the Creole character, the contemporary academic forsakes it and focuses instead on Jane's quest for truth and love. In the end of Stevenson's version, we are presented with a letter from Robert Rochester to Mrs Ashford (the former Miss Temple in Brontë's original), which says: 'I know that, had she [Jane] lived longer, she would have presented my mother [Bertha] in a different, slightly softer, light. But, as she once said to me, we are all bound within the island of our time, and our upbringing, and only a great passion, a great faith, can free us from it' (173). Thomas uses Robert's letter to explain away the prejudiced and unfair treatment Bertha receives in the sequel, arguing that Jane's judgement of the Creole is conditioned by factors beyond her control. It seems an unconvincing defence, given that the mock-Victorian narrative transgresses a number of nineteenth-century social codes and is obviously free from the bondage of historical reality. Robert's letter perhaps offers the most direct explanation for Bertha's betrayal in the following: 'only a great passion, a great faith, can free us'. I read this as a kind of confession, that one needs 'great passion, a great faith' to free the character Bertha from Brontë's original. Thomas is not the author to free her.

iii. Adèle: The Hidden Story of Jane Eyre (2002)

Of the three neo-Victorian novels under consideration, the representation of Bertha is the most substantial in Emma Tennant's *Adèle: The Hidden Story of Jane Eyre* (hereafter *Adèle*), which is influenced by both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It expands on the story of the

young heroine Adèle Varens, who is Rochester's bastard daughter by Céline Varens in Brontë's original. In opening the narrative with the young heroine's perspective, *Adèle* immediately recalls both the heroines in the Victorian novel (Jane) and its Caribbean adaptation (Antoinette). Additionally, just like Haire-Sargeant's *H: The Story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights*, *Adèle* makes reference to the parrot and the name Antoinette from Rhys's text. However, in *Adèle*, it is the young girl who owns the bird, while Bertha is subversively compared to a parrot: 'And—when [Bertha] thinks we are about to be disturbed at our games high on the roof—"Qui est là? Qui est là?" she calls out, which reminds me so strongly of our parrot in the rue Vaugirard' (52-53). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, when Antoinette's parrot Coco speaks to strangers, it asks 'qui est là? qui est là?', a question it eerily and assertively answers itself: 'ché Coco, ché Coco'. The intertextual reference produces a disconcerting and distorting effect; the Bertha character is now reconfigured as a parroting human whose speech is reduced to repetitive expressions. Another reference to the Caribbean text in Tennant's novel is the use of the name 'Antoinette': 'for I can see that poor Antoinette, as she [Antoinette] tells me I can call her, is as much a stranger in this place as I am' (52). All these references make it clear that Tennant is not only familiar with but also intentionally quoting *Wide Sargasso Sea*.³⁷

While Rhys chooses to give voice to Bertha, Tennant privileges Adèle, a character described by Susan M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) as one of the three 'negative "role-models"' (350) for *Jane Eyre*.³⁸ Adèle is mostly a neglected character, a 'blind spot', so to speak, in the original text and is almost absent in critical analyses. When the child is discussed, she is often dismissively evaluated, as the following rather harsh and scornful interpretation by Gilbert and Gubar (1979) shows:

Adèle, though hardly a woman, is already a 'little woman,' cunning and doll-like, [...] Ostensibly a poor orphan child, like Jane herself, Adèle is evidently the natural

³⁷ Another reference to *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Tennant's novel is Bertha's nurse, Christophine, a character created by Rhys. In *Adèle*, the eponymous character says, 'I had no idea then, of any connection between the man Jenny says I must know as Papa and the woman from the spice islands who sings to me as a Creole maid of Maman's once did, songs my new playmate says come from an old woman who loved her, Christophine' (55).

³⁸ The other two 'negative' female role-models for Jane, according to Gilbert and Gubar, are Blanche Ingram and Grace Poole (350). They also mention Mrs Fairfax as an important female character (but not a negative role-model) in *Jane Eyre*. Interestingly, Tennant turns Mrs Fairfax into the ultimate villain in *Adèle*. According to Heta Pyrhöne (2011), this treatment of her 'may be related to Tennant's goal of presenting a wholly new and unexpected twist to well-known intertexts. After all, previous adaptations have neglected both Adèle and Mrs Fairfax' (114). These changes in narrative roles suggest the original text's malleability for generating new fictions and meanings.

daughter of Edward Rochester's dissipated youth. Accordingly, she longs for fashionable gowns rather than for love or freedom, and, the way her mother Céline did, sings and dances for her supper as if she were a clockwork temptress invented by E. T. A. Hoffman. [...] May not Adèle, the daughter of a 'fallen woman,' be a model female in a world of prostitutes? (350)³⁹

Adèle is now resurrected by Tennant as a traumatised girl who, like other similarly aged children, craves the love of her father and hopes for the reunion of her parents.⁴⁰ This is a much more sympathetic representation of the character than the original allows. Adèle is marginalised in several ways in *Jane Eyre*, even more so than Bertha, although both are 'transplanted', against their own will, from their home to England. Adèle is a child, a girl, a foreigner and a bastard, quadrupling her disadvantage. That the concept of Tennant's book is modelled on Rhys's is unmistakable: *Adèle* follows the Caribbean writer's pattern and gives history to a relatively 'minor' character in *Jane Eyre*, Adèle, including her life in Paris before her arrival in England. In this narrative, we learn more about her mother Céline as well. Readers are reminded that apart from Jane and Bertha, there are other women in Rochester's younger, philandering life.⁴¹

I am particularly interested in Adèle's interaction with Bertha in Tennant's book. The author writes in the Preface: 'Adèle Varens, the child who comes to Thornfield as Mr. Rochester's ward, uncovers a hidden history in the fabric of Thornfield Hall' (ix). This 'hidden history', needless to say, refers to Bertha, whom Adèle befriends: 'she is my new friend, brought to me here on the roof of Thornfield Hall' (51). Tennant draws attention to the similarities between the Caribbean and Europe, as Adèle comments, 'Her [Bertha's] accent places her somewhere in my memory' (51) and 'here she has placed a quilt that is the color of the exotic flowers Maman preserved and brought back with her from the time she went to dance in Martinique, far, far away across the sea' (52). Uniting these two marginalised non-English female characters, teasing out the hidden discrimination in the Anglo-centric original, is inspired. The union, however, does not last long, as Bertha resumes her 'madness': '[Adèle], too, [had] loved the Creole and seen her become a stranger overnight' (222). Bertha leaves

³⁹ In *Jane Eyre*, Adèle is described in unflattering but not damning terms. The girl has 'no great talents, no marked traits of character, no peculiar development of feeling or taste which raised her one inch above the ordinary level of childhood; but neither had she any deficiency or vice which sunk her below it' (*JE*).

⁴⁰ See, for example, Heta Pyrhönen's *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and Its Progeny* (2011) for a discussion of the trope of trauma in *Adèle* (110-116).

⁴¹ There is scope for novels written from Céline Varens's or Blanche Ingram's perspectives, although 'many feminist critics have focused on the Rochester-centred romantic triangles of Jane and Rochester and Bertha or of Jane and Rochester and Blanche Ingram' (Godfrey, 2005:865).

the narrative altogether, just as in the original, and a new family is formed in the end, consisting of Adèle, Rochester, Jane and their children. Sue Thomas argues in *Imperialism, Reform, and the Making of Englishness in Jane Eyre* (2008) that while Bertha in *Jane Eyre* is made into an uneducable character who renders the colonial civilising mission ineffectual: 'Rochester is more confident about the educability of the child Adèle' (40).⁴² Although Adèle, like Bertha, is a foreigner, she is European, which perhaps makes her position within the family more comfortable than the Creole Bertha's. Tennant's interpretation of *Jane Eyre*, then, returns to the ideal of the original. *Adèle* works in a similar way to Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*; it interrupts the source text by allowing a marginalised character to tell her story but ultimately it does not alter the original ending as it relates to Bertha.

In the text, the reader is often reminded of Adèle's status as a bastard child: 'a pitiful bastard from the Paris gutter' and 'the little French bastard of Monsieur Rochester' (43, 73). In fact, another title Tennant gives the text is *The French Dancer's Bastard*, which explicitly alludes to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). At the beginning of the novel, Adèle hopes for a complete family: 'we shall all be one happy family together: Papa, Maman, and Adèle. And definitely no Jane Eyre!' (64) And definitely no Bertha, either. Despite Adèle's initial prejudice towards Jane, after Céline dies, Adèle changes her mind regarding her former governess and eventually considers Jane her 'companion': 'Jane—the owner of the cool quiet voice that has finally brought me here to find my past and my future—will be my companion and guide in life' (209). By the end of the narrative, Jane has become Adèle's stepmother (224). It is the British Jane – not the Creole Bertha nor the Parisian Céline – who assumes the role of Adèle's mother. The young girl's quest for a happy family is complete: 'So the family at Thornfield lived happily ever after' (224). This conclusion is reminiscent of a fairy-tale with the young and emotionally suffering heroine being rewarded with a happy family. The ending also conforms neatly to the idealised Victorian notion of family. In relation to the two adult female characters, Jane and Bertha, the finale symbolically places Jane back at the centre of both the family and the novel, while her counterpart Bertha becomes only a ghostly presence.

⁴² In *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (1993), Firdous Azim also points out Bertha's supposed uneducability: 'Recalcitrant and uneducable, she escapes the dominating and hegemonising imperialist and educational processes' (182). Bertha's and Adèle's relative 'educability' is particularly interesting if compared to Jane's own education and her role as a governess. Azim writes, 'Jane, in the imperialist role of educator, carefully marks the *differences* between the European woman and Eastern harem inmates' (181, emphasis original).

Lin Haire-Sargeant's *H: The Story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights*, D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* and Emma Tennant's *Adèle: Jane Eyre's Hidden Story* use Bertha to different extents but in the end, the authors choose to reiterate her madness and death. These novels also seem to put Bertha narratologically back to her place in Brontë's original: at the margin, outside the fold, as part of the supporting cast. In these texts, there is, then, a re-orientation of narrative focus away from Bertha, as she is not as prominently featured as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a text that all three contemporary writers demonstrate knowledge of and to a certain extent pay homage to. That Haire-Sargeant, Thomas and Tennant appropriate *Wide Sargasso Sea* and yet ultimately disregard the substantiated personal history of Antoinette offered in Rhys's text and instead subscribe to Brontë's representation suggests that they implicitly deny, parody and subvert Rhys's achievements and situate their works more comfortably with the Victorian author's version. The newer books' allegiance with the nineteenth-century text is problematic, since neo-Victorian novels generally promote political correctness and privilege suppressed and marginalised characters overlooked in the canon. The contemporary writers' treatment of Bertha therefore upsets our expectations and urges us to reconsider the level of political engagement of the neo-Victorian genre.

Many neo-Victorian novels are informed by and propagate liberal political ideologies. They contest conventional Victorian perspectives and participate in the critical re-evaluation of history. However, as Christian Gutlben (2001) argues, 'Repeated from one novel to another, these politically correct perspectives, far from being subversive or innovative, become predictable, not to say redundant' (169). He further argues that from an ideological point of view these perspectives 'can be likened to a compulsive demeanour or "a conditioned reflex"' and from an aesthetic point of view 'can hardly pretend to any originality' (169). The contemporary writers discussed above seem to respond to the dominant and corrective neo-Victorian agenda and their responses to some extent reflect a symptom of fatigue towards explicitly writing back to the canon as a source of racial, ethnic, social and gender injustice and discrimination. In particular, they challenge neo-Victorian postcolonial engagement through their knowingly off-kilter representation of Bertha. A risky move, perhaps, as the writers forsake consensual politics for originality. They also appear to downplay the violence

of imperialism and colonialism in their narratives, the unfortunate consequences of which are still felt by many, to create a kind of aesthetic curiosity.

Are we to interpret that the writers, who are not themselves from Rhys's specific former colonial background, are insensitive to others' political plights or are resigned to the fact that their power to express their subjectivities is limited? Are they merely prioritising their aesthetic preferences? After all, artists are not necessarily obliged to engage politically. Or is it possible to read their representations of Bertha as based on an ideological decision to undermine the revisionist agenda of neo-Victorian fiction, even to remind us that the genre is a parasitic form of entertainment, too feeble to create concrete change but ready and willing to exploit ideological fashions? The novels prompt such questions but do not provide clear answers. Below, I will try to discuss some possible interpretations of the writers' narrative depiction of Bertha. In many ways my analysis of the writers' narrative depiction of Bertha is speculative. A general trend towards a reconsideration or even rejection of neo-Victorian political revisionism has not yet fully emerged, and may not emerge at all. The three contemporary novels may prove to be outliers in a sea of political correction, stirring ripples and nothing more. On the other hand, we may see more novels which probing the politics and ethics in neo-Victorian fiction.

Neo-Victorian critics have long identified the tropes and approaches repeatedly used by authors in the genre. In particular, they are very aware of the role political correctness plays in conditioning the ideology and direction of the works. Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben (2010), for instance, write: 'certain neo-Victorian perspectives – the nineteenth-century fallen woman, medium, or homosexual [...] have become rather over-used, tired, and hackneyed, to the point where it becomes difficult to view them any longer as embodiments of an ethics of alterity' (23). It is also possible to imagine postcolonial subjects being included in this list, since colonised subjectivities are often considered Other – alter – and this alterity has already been explored in neo-Victorian fiction. Haire-Sargeant's, Thomas's and Tennant's texts provide a counterdiscourse to the kind of literature described by Kohlke and Gutleben. The authors deliberately return to a quintessentially Victorian perspective, one that they, in the neo-Victorian mode, would be expected to contest or revise. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the subaltern speaks through the expanded representation of Antoinette and the West Indies as well as repositioning the 'peripheral' more centrally. However, in the new texts, the

subaltern is in the end ‘shut up’⁴³ once again and the centre re-centred; the characters who finally survive are from Britain and Europe.⁴⁴

The larger implications of the return to *Jane Eyre* rather than *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the novels discussed in this section may suggest that neo-Victorian postcolonialism is now being reevaluated or reconsidered from different perspectives.⁴⁵ Haire-Sargeant’s, Thomas’s and Tennant’s novels do not necessarily highlight an ebbing interest in postcolonial approaches to Victorian literature among all writers. However, they may speak to a developing sense of fatigue among some authors towards viewing the nineteenth-century novel as primarily an imperialistic genre or the neo-Victorian as a politically corrective enterprise. A related scepticism has already demonstrated itself in literary criticism. For example, in ‘Preface for a Post-Postcolonial Criticism’ (2003), which is largely a contestation of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s ‘Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism’ (1985), Erin O’Connor laments that ‘the success of the postcolonial project has come, at least in part, at the expense of Victorian studies’ (219) and calls for ‘a post-postcolonial criticism’ (240). Although O’Connor’s text is not without its critics,⁴⁶ it shows that some scholars feel the need to reassess the theoretical paradigms and apparatuses applied to the study of Victorian literature to date.

Haire-Sargeant’s, Thomas’s and Tennant’s books also suggest the beginnings of a different form of neo-Victorianism. If one reason for neo-Victorian revision of the nineteenth century is ‘a postcolonial backlash against a continuing valorisation of the English literary canon’ (Moore, 2008:134), the three neo-Victorian novel provide a backlash against the backlash. The novels may represent a different, but by no means last, stage in postcolonial studies: in them, we are reminded of the metamorphoses of ideologies across historical periods. *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* were themselves written in very specific moments in history and reflect the imperial and colonial views of their times. The former was written ‘at a very

⁴³ A reference to the titles ‘Can the Subaltern Speak’ (1988) by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and ‘Shutting up the Subaltern: Silences, Stereotypes, and Double-Entendre in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*’ (1999) by Carine M. Mardorossian.

⁴⁴ My use of ‘centre’ follows Peter Hulme’s example in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (1998), in which he uses the term to refer to ‘the cultural ‘centres’ of Western Europe and North America’ (5).

⁴⁵ Bernadine Evaristo’s *Blonde Roots* (2008), in which ‘whyte Europeanes’ are enslaved by ‘blak Aphrikans’, seems to participate in this reevaluation process, not so much to take the history of African slavery lightly but to explore it in a new context.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Deirdre David’s ‘She Who Must Be Obeyed: A Response to Erin O’Connor’ (2003) and Patrick Brantlinger’s ‘Let’s Post-Post-Post “Victoriorientalism”’ (2003).

particular historical and social nexus' (Carr, 1996:14) and offers 'a very precise allusion to a particular moment in the history of slave rebellion in Jamaica and of the British campaign for the abolition of slavery' (Thomas, 2008:3), while the latter was published when Black emancipation movement was gathering force. Likewise, the three neo-Victorian texts may reveal part of the contemporary state of mind. The triptych, the Victorian *Jane Eyre*, the postcolonial *Wide Sargasso Sea* and the neo-Victorian works, inscribe their own narratives on the issue of imperialism, colonialism and postcolonialism. They should therefore be read together as an evolving unit. While *Jane Eyre*, through its Caribbean and colonial elements, prefigures *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Wide Sargasso Sea* in turn paves the way for the three later neo-Victorian texts. As such, continuity is discerned in these works and they belong to one formation, even though their ideological emphases may differ.

Haire-Sargeant's, Thomas's and Tennant's cannibalistic consumption of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* demonstrates a stronger affinity with the Victorian text. Apart from demonstrating their contestation of (post)colonial ideology, this return to the nineteenth century reveals the ways in which they wrestle with their literary influences and assert their own identity. The three authors are writing belatedly, in the sense that they are latecomers in both colonial and postcolonial discourses. They can neither produce genuine colonial fiction nor original postcolonial texts, for they are not writing from the 'right' moments or locations. As twentieth-century Anglo-American writers, they have probably not directly experienced the aftermath of imperialism and the impact of colonialism as intimately as some postcolonial writers. Thus, unwilling or unable to produce more postcolonial re-readings of canonical texts such as *Jane Eyre* by rewriting *Wide Sargasso Sea*, they find a new way to address history as well as to put autonomous distance between them and their literary precursors.

To this end, they have chosen to return to what *Wide Sargasso Sea* seeks to transgress; that is, the original textual grandmother, *Jane Eyre*, which proves to be their ideological 'home'. This restoration of Brontë's representations mediated through the prism of a Caribbean text may at first seem counter-productive, but the move highlights two fundamental characteristics and aesthetics of the neo-Victorian genre. Firstly, neo-Victorian fiction ultimately looks to the Victorian work as the totemic text for communion, as the more influential and 'mythical' of the two. Given two canonical novels to choose from, the contemporary writers have opted for a stronger affiliation with *Jane Eyre* and its Victorian

ideals rather than Rhys's postcolonial reinterpretations. Secondly, the process of neo-Victorian literary cannibalism is cumulative, continuing and cyclic, a process that might almost be described as regurgitative. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which consumes and undermines *Jane Eyre* for its own modernist and Caribbean ideological and artistic expression, is devoured, usurped and partially spat out by Haire-Sargeant, Thomas and Tennant. Their novels feed on both the Victorian and postcolonial pre-texts. Together, these three stages of the novel offer a microcosm of the flexible pattern of cannibalism in the neo-Victorian genre. The latest palimpsestic neo-Victorian texts' return to and interrogation of both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* is meaningful, not so much because of the quality of their writing, but because they demonstrate changing literary tastes and ideological affiliations.

V. Conclusion: Literary ouroboros

This chapter first investigated the strong bond between postcolonialism and neo-Victorian fiction, as demonstrated in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, often regarded as the foundational neo-Victorian text. That this novel occupies an important position in the genre as well as postcolonial literature makes the colonial and Caribbean elements in its Victorian source, *Jane Eyre*, an essential study. The chapter discussed the pattern of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s literary cannibalism of Brontë's novel. Lastly, it explored a group of contemporary neo-Victorian novels which revisit both *Jane Eyre* and its Caribbean adaptation *Wide Sargasso Sea*. These books reorient the focus of the story from the subaltern Bertha back to the British characters; that is, the central characters in the original text. This reorientation speaks to yet another phase of literary cannibalism and even points to the changing attitude towards postcolonial studies today. From the three groups of novels we see that it is often difficult to discern exactly who is the agent of cannibalism and who is the victim, and when or where the process might end. The roles of eater and eaten are infinitely reversible; the feast an endless literary ouroboros. There are different stages of literary cannibalism, beginning with the Victorian author's use of 'the other' through to contemporary Anglo-American novelists' cannibalisation of a Caribbean neo-Victorian text. This situation is also perhaps reflective of the nature and influence of imperialism, a process which still impacts the cultural production of both Britain and its former colonies.

CHAPTER FOUR

Academic Cannibals in Neo-Victorian Fiction

‘The corpus of literature resembles a cow in that its parts when cut up occupy a hierarchy similar [to] that occupied by fillets, prime ribs, New York strips, etc., in the meat trade. And just as those parts of the animals that cannot be made presentable are ground up and turned into hamburger or sausage, such too is the fate of non-canonical literature. If the butchers in this crass analogy are the literary scholars, the sausage-makers are the historians.’ –Christopher Kent (2004)

While the previous chapters discussed neo-Victorian cannibalism of Victorian authors, texts and historical features, this chapter focuses on a group of contemporary novels that respond to the nineteenth century from a different angle. The books considered here obliquely or overtly incorporate two elements found in literature: the scholar figure and the inheritance plot. These two elements, when used in the contemporary texts, reflexively comment on the neo-Victorian genre as a whole. The novels all feature scholars or academics, figures that not only readily recall their unflatteringly portrayed counterparts in Victorian fiction and poetry, but are also to some extent intellectual cannibals who feed on others’ work. These academic figures perform different narrative functions in the neo-Victorian texts: 1) scholarly editors who act peripherally in the novels and ostensibly annotate and comment upon Victorian found manuscripts; 2) postgraduate students writing theses on the Victorian era and who are protagonists within the narratives and 3) academic staff, also main characters, who are researching Victorian topics. In these different roles, the scholar figure is invariably portrayed as somehow suspicious or unreliable, thereby undermining their credibility and reminding us of Victorian representations of scholars such as George Eliot’s Casaubon. These representations, I argue, cannibalise a Victorian trope as well as providing a commentary on the relationship between scholarship, fiction and the Victorian inheritance. The centrality of the scholar figure in these novels also speaks to the interconnected and cannibalistic relationship between the publishing industry and Victorian studies today. Finally, read together, these contemporary novels suggest that fiction rather than scholarship is the preferable response to Victorian literature.

I. Academic cannibals

In a memorable scene from the psychological thriller *Hannibal* (2001), the eponymous character, a psychiatrist and an ‘academic cannibal’ (Jennings, 2012), motivated by culinary predilection, consumes part of a man’s brains, while the victim is still alive and oblivious to his being transformed into his host’s meal. The scene disturbingly yet effectively brings to mind the substance of psychoanalysis, the analyst ‘getting into’ the patient’s mind. Maggie Kilgour (1988), discussing the character, believes that analysis and cannibalism ‘form a continuum differentiated only by degree, not kind’ (249). The scene can also be seen as a grotesque manifestation and reminder of what happens regularly in society: people feed on others’ brains. Although the form of consumption is rarely as literal and material as in *Hannibal*, it is common for individuals to live off the efforts of others’ minds. Kilgour (1998)

goes so far to say that ‘those who consume what others have produced, are cannibals after all’ (256). Critics, for example, ‘have often been denounced as cannibals, parasites, vampires, and predatory ghouls who, unable to create themselves, feed on the work of others’ (238). Scholars and academics, too, rely on researching, critiquing and consuming others’ work to create their own. The connection between criticism and academic pursuit is drawn out by Kilgour: ‘Criticism is a sinful and destructive force that invidiously preys upon artistic creativity, and perhaps also upon itself – as Malcolm Bradbury also suggested in his satire of academic life, *Eating People is Wrong*’ (239).

If Bradbury is suggesting that academics are savage cannibals in his novel *Eating People is Wrong* (1959), a title taken from Michael Flanders and Donald Swann’s song ‘The Reluctant Cannibal’ (first recorded in 1957), he is not the first to see them in a negative light. The academic, the scholar, the intellectual or as A.D. Nuttall calls them collectively, ‘the Knower’, has long been regarded as a contemptuous figure in history and literature. In *Dead from the Waist Down* (2003), Nuttall argues that there was a great change in the idea of the Knower between the early modern period and the nineteenth century, ‘a movement away from electric danger, Faustian glamour, commerce with the devil, towards a sexless deathliness’ (1). Indeed, in nineteenth-century literary texts such as Thomas Love Peacock’s *Headlong Hall* (1815), George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1872), Robert Browning’s poem ‘The Grammarian’s Funeral’ (1855) and Henry James’s *The Aspern Papers* (1888) scholarly labour is portrayed as sterile, the butt of mockery and the subject of moral ridicule. In particular, Eliot’s Mr Casaubon, although ‘a meticulous scholar’, is ‘one of the best-known fictional representations of “dryasdust” historian’ (Southgate, 2009:50). He comes to symbolise the tedious and unappealing nature of scholarly endeavours, so much so that Suzanne Keen (2001) comments, ‘To be a literary scholar has been a deadly attribute for a fictional character since George Eliot’s Casaubon wasted his life in futile research’ (28). What both Nuttall and Keen emphasise is the aura of deathliness and futility evoked by scholar characters in literature, themes which neo-Victorian novels cannibalise, as discussed in this chapter. Modern-day academic characters are suggestively frequent and central to neo-Victorian fiction. Why are contemporary writers so attracted to the university setting and its denizens? And what is the function of situating contemporary academics in neo-Victorian novels?

The academic novel has emerged as a recognisable subcategory of contemporary fiction over the past half century. Elaine Showalter in *Faculty Towers* (2005) contends that the genre has

risen since about 1950, ‘when post-war universities were growing rapidly’ (1), suggesting a strong connection between the wider accessibility of tertiary education and the more visible representation of the institution in literature. Naturally, as more people have the opportunity to attend university, the likelihood that more authors will use it as a setting increases, as does the number of readers with whom the topic will resonate. The prevalence of the university in fiction has been continually felt in the past few decades, which ‘witnessed a proliferation of representations of archives in which scholarly and amateur characters seek information in collections of documents’ (Keen, 2001:3).¹ The growing and possibly outsized attention that fiction pays to the institution may additionally speak to the recent emergence of creative writing courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, where the writers-in-training may take inspiration from the very setting in which they receive their education.

Neo-Victorian novels which feature university plots and academic characters reflect the ability of the genre to adapt to and incorporate existing trends, in this case, the wider emergence of the campus novel. Interestingly, many writers who use the university as a backdrop or write about scholarly figures in their neo-Victorian works at one stage belonged to academia. For example, in her article ‘The *Nice Work* of Victorian Novels in Thatcher’s Britain’ (2008), Rosemarie Bodenheimer discusses David Lodge’s academic affiliation and its relationship to *Nice Work* (1988): ‘Written just after he had retired from teaching duties at the University of Birmingham, *Nice Work* offers a somewhat wistful farewell to the idea of the university radically threatened by the Thatcher government’ (171). Likewise, Robin Gilmour (2000) brings up Lodge’s scholarly background when discussing the same book (196). Some neo-Victorian novelists’ fictional outputs are even inspired by their own academic research, as in the case of Sarah Waters, who ‘read a fair amount of nineteenth-century pornography and dictionaries of slang and vulgar words’ for her PhD. For example, her research led her to the phrase ‘tipping the velvet’ (Victorian slang for cunnilingus),² which became the title of her first book. Another example of a writer’s academic background influencing her writing can be seen in A.S. Byatt’s *Possession*. Tim S. Gauthier (2006)

¹ For a sense of the proliferation of books within the genre, see ‘Novel Academic Novels’ (5 June 2011) and ‘Novel Academic Novels: A Sequel’ (11 June 2012) on *The Chronicle of Higher Education* website.

² Although this detail has been removed from Sarah Waters’s website, one can still see it here: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070217174712/http://www.sarahwaters.com/biog.htm>. In other places, Waters openly talks about how the writing of a PhD thesis benefited her fiction-writing: ‘I was doing a PhD on lesbian and gay historical fiction and started thinking that I’d like to try a lesbian historical novel’ (*Mslexia*, ‘Sarah Waters’) and ‘It was only through doing the PhD thesis that I was able to go on and do the fiction; it gave me the discipline and the confidence to write. As soon as I finished the thesis – well, I’d had the idea for the first novel, *Tipping the Velvet*, while I was writing the thesis’ (Hogan, ‘Sarah Waters’).

comments, ‘Well-versed in the language and techniques of both poststructuralism and postmodernism, by virtue of her academic background, her self-conscious texts openly reflect upon and question their own historicising process’ (25). Showalter (2005) asserts that ‘When English professors write novels, they tend to write about what they know best’ (9). This suggests a certain level of self-cannibalism, in which the academic novelists incorporate their own knowledge and experience in their creative fiction so that one expertise feeds the other. (For these authors, exploiting their education and research in fiction can be rewarding both financially and in terms of fame as it allows them to go beyond the normal realms of academia and appeal to a broader audience.) Showalter calls this process the ‘ultimate narcissism’ (3) and Leslie Fiedler (2007[1965]) describes it even more disparagingly as ‘incestuous’ (46). Indeed, the use of academic characters in novels by writers who once were or still are associated with academia represents a postmodernist self-reflexivity, usually speaking to an insular culture folding in on itself.³

If the university provides inspiration for writers, it may also guide the public’s perceptions of a literary work. Readers may evaluate texts partly on the writer’s academic association. This is shown, for example, by a question Abigail Dennis (2008) asked Sarah Waters in an interview: ‘Do you have any thoughts on how the reception of your books, both critical and popular, might have been influenced by the fact that people were aware of your background as a scholar?’ (48) Dennis also pointed out that the reviewers of Waters’s books tended to emphasise her ‘academic credentials’ and wondered if that offered her ‘a fast-tracking into the literary club’ (49). These observations suggest that authors’ scholarly background might lend them a certain level of added authority, perhaps especially for works with a historical setting that require at least some knowledge and understanding of the period. Waters herself seemed to endorse this view by responding, ‘it [her background as a scholar] does often get mentioned in reviews, as if it gives me this extra credibility or something [...] maybe it does give me this sort of a doctor’s cap’ (48).

Indeed, if a neo-Victorian novelist is or was also a scholar (better still, a Victorian scholar), this special double-identity tends to be highlighted when his or her book is reviewed or studied. Christian Gutleben mentions Charles Palliser’s academic background, albeit casually,

³ A.S. Byatt, author of *Possession* (1990), which centres on academic research, notes: ‘I thought it was a niche book for academics’ (qtd. in Higgins and Davies, 2010). That is to say, Byatt, a scholar herself, was aware of the appeal of her book to a specific group of people represented in the novel but was perhaps surprised by her book’s wider public reception.

in the following: ‘Palliser published several articles on Victorian writers and then wrote his huge pastiche *The Quincunx* (1989), an exercise which he later took up again in *The Unburied* (1999)’ (186). Although Gutleben does not elaborate on the relevance of Palliser’s scholarly past to his neo-Victorian writing, what is implicit is that this particular biographical detail *is* relevant to the discussion. Perhaps Gutleben thinks it necessary to divulge this information because for him Palliser’s academic background gives his fiction added weight or because it seems a little unusual for a scholar to be engaged in creative writing. According to Elif Batuman (2010), ‘literary historians don’t write about creative writing, and creative writers don’t write literary histories’ (3). Palliser, a literary historian who writes creative fiction, is thus, according to Batuman, a strange hybrid crossing the divide between scholarship and creative writing. If this is the case, Palliser however is not the only hybrid. In fact, as this chapter argues, many neo-Victorian writers are themselves literary scholars, which perhaps suggests the highly cultured and self-reflexive nature of the genre.

The cannibalistic character of the campus novel is further manifested in the scholarly attention the genre attracts. As Elaine Showalter writes, there is now ‘a small body of criticism devoted to it’ (2). Showalter’s own book, *Faculty Towers*, which explores ‘the ways novels about the academy have charted changes in universities and society since 1950’, belongs to this corpus of critical work.⁴ The academic novel is thus to some extent a self-enclosed enterprise. The relationship between neo-Victorian fiction and neo-Victorian criticism is even more claustrophobic and self-cannibalising. Ann Schwan (2011) remarks, ‘Alongside a spurt of neo-Victorian fiction over the last ten years, the academic subfield of neo-Victorian studies has come into its own’ (161). As mentioned before, feminist, postcolonial and social critiques are inherent in certain novels in the genre. The novelists are likely to have been informed by theoretical ideas espoused by academics, who in turn, picking up on the same themes, approach the works through matching critical frameworks. One result is a circular discussion between creative writers and their critics. Take Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* and its scholarly studies as an example. *Jack Maggs* conducts a postcolonial reading of *Great Expectations* and is itself a postcolonial commentary (in the form of fiction) of its Victorian predecessor. Then, critics such as Simon Joyce (2007), who argues that *Jack Maggs* is a response to Edward Said’s ‘insistence that we rethink *Great Expectations* from an Australian perspective, seeing Victorian Britain and its colony as

⁴ For a survey of some important articles devoted to the campus novel, see *The Academic Novel: New and Classical Essays* (2007).

interdependent spaces' (166) and Georges Letissier (2004), who contends that *Jack Maggs* "writes back" against a canonised Victorian text' (124), can be seen as reiterating what is already present in the novel using different language. Likewise, neo-Victorian texts that explore issues relating to race, gender and sexuality often find that critics make explicit or even repeat the themes of their novels with scholarly rhetoric. Thus, the two bodies of work, neo-Victorian fiction and its scholarship, cannibalistically feed on and perpetuate one another.

Despite being a primarily twentieth-century genre, the campus novel has strong affiliations with Victorian fiction. Showalter explains that one reason she likes academic novels is 'their similarity to Victorian ones' (6). She observes that 'The academic novel proper doesn't start until the 1950s, but there are nineteenth-century precursors' (6), citing Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857) as 'the great ur-narrative of academic politics' (6). After establishing that contemporary academic novels follow the nineteenth-century pattern, Showalter goes on to say that 'Many of the best and most successful books of the past fifty years have been rewritings of Victorian novels' (9). She lists, among others, A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, discussed below, and David Lodge's *Nice Work*, which recalls Victorian industrial novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845).

If the academic novel has its precedents in Victorian fiction, it is not surprising that neo-Victorian novelists have been attracted to the genre, especially considering its contemporary popularity. What is particularly interesting is that the novelists, instead of writing straightforward historical fiction (by which I mean novels entirely set in the nineteenth century), introduce *modern-day* scholars into the narratives to interact with the Victorian elements in the books. In these cases, the academic figure functions as a bridge or a medium between past and present. This, according to Gutleben (2001), is a privileged position, so much so that 'an academic studying the Victorian tradition' is the 'representative of today's culture' (180). However, as this chapter will show, the neo-Victorian novels employing academic characters seem to exhibit reservation, scepticism or even hostility towards scholarly activity. Collectively, they question the validity of intellectual pursuit as the best form in which to inherit Victorian legacies, and by extension, history in general. Many of the academics in these novels, beyond being simply sexless and deathly, like Casaubon in

Middlemarch,⁵ are also untrustworthy and even detrimental to the acquisition of knowledge. Below, I will look at three types of neo-Victorian scholar characters: those who operate only peripherally but nevertheless control the texts, such as editors and annotators of Victorian found manuscripts; PhD students, in other words, ‘trainee academics’, who are writing on Victorian subjects and lastly, academics whose Victorian research is the central focus of the novels.⁶ Together, these works form an anti-academic argument and suggest that scholarship is an ineffective way to inherit the Victorian legacy, a stance perhaps most obviously represented by the third group of books. This type of novel also clearly cannibalises an additional literary trope, the inheritance plot.

II. Editing and annotating the Victorian

Academics are sometimes used in marginal spaces in neo-Victorian texts, as editors or writers of paratextual material.⁷ One example is William J. Palmer’s *The Detective And Mr. Dickens* (1990), which is ostensibly Wilkie Collins’s private memoir.⁸ In this novel, the fictional editor, also called William J. Palmer, writes: ‘These papers have recently been opened to the research scrutiny of scholars. [...] I wish to thank the University of North Anglia for permitting me to edit and publish this hitherto unpublished (and almost certainly suppressed) literary document’ (vii-viii). Although it is unclear if ‘Palmer’ is a member of the university or in what capacity he gains access to the document, the quotation establishes him as a kind of scholar and lends authenticity and importance to the work. The fictional ‘University of North Anglia’ reminds one of the University of East Anglia, renowned for its MA creative writing programme, the first of its kind in Britain. The choice of location is likely an intentional reference to the British literary scene. In terms of neo-Victorian fiction it also proves fitting, as neo-Victorian writers such as John Fowles (*The French Lieutenant’s Woman* [1969]), David Lodge (*Nice Work* [1988]) and Michèle Roberts (*In The Red Kitchen* [1990]) have lectured or held writing fellowships there.

⁵ Christian Gutleben (2001) notes that the contemporary scholars in A.S. Byatt’s *Possession* are ‘weary of sexuality’ (201) and Suzanne Keen (2001) believes the two main contemporary academic characters Maud Bailey and Roland Michell are ‘highly educated but sterile’ (37).

⁶ Apart from the novels that will be discussed in this chapter, some other contemporary works employing modern-day scholar characters researching aspects of the nineteenth century include Brian Moore’s *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975), Howard Jacobson’s *Peeping Tom* (1984), Lindsay Clarke’s *The Chymical Wedding* (1989), Jane Urquhart’s *Changing Heaven* (1990), Charles Palliser’s *The Unburied* (1999), A.S. Byatt’s ‘Precipice-Encurled’, collected in *Sugar and Other Stories* (1987) and *The Biographer’s Tale* (2001) and Benjamin Markovits’s *The Symn Papers* (2002), *Imposture* (2007) and *Childish Loves* (2011).

⁷ By ‘marginal spaces’ I refer to literal marginality: before (prefixing) or after (suffixing) the main text (in the form of foreword and afterword) or at the bottom of the page (in the form of footnotes).

⁸ William J. Palmer, himself a Professor of English, has written scholarly work on Dickens. See, for example, *Dickens and New Historicism* (1995).

In Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992),⁹ the writer of the Introduction to the text (also named Alasdair Gray) similarly evokes academic institutions and his own exhaustive efforts to authenticate Archibald McCandless's found manuscript: 'After six months of research among the archives of Glasgow University, the Mitchell Library's Old Glasgow Room, the Scottish National Library, Register House in Edinburgh, Somerset House in London and the National Newspaper Archive of the British Library at Colindale I have collected enough material evidence to prove the McCandless story a complete tissue of facts' (xii). While the editor Gray believes that McCandless's account is fact ('I had written enough fiction to know history when I read it' [xi]), the historian who originally discovered the manuscript disagrees ('he had written enough history to recognise fiction' [xi]). Does the novelist-turned-editor or the historian have a stronger claim on history? Although the issue is never fully resolved in the novel, the fact that the fictional editor Gray has lost the original manuscript of McCandless's memoir compromises the authenticity of his work ('Somewhere between editor, publisher, typesetter and photographer the unique first edition was mislaid' [xiv].)

By using their own names in their novels, Palmer and Gray not only cannibalise their academic knowledge, they also cannibalise themselves. Both *The Detective And Mr. Dickens* and *Poor Things* make use of research plot lines to add authenticity to the found manuscripts of the story. In other novels, however, we see the opposite process in action, that is, the use of scholarship to question the authenticity of a text. For example, the fictional editor in Michael Cox's *The Meaning of Night* (2007[2006]),¹⁰ J.J. Antrobus, who is 'Professor of Post-Authentic Victorian Fiction' from the University of Cambridge, points out the novelistic qualities of a found manuscript: 'It is a strange concoction, being a kind of confession, often shocking in its frank, conscienceless brutality and explicit sexuality, that also has a strongly novelistic flavour; indeed, it appears in the hand-list that accompanies the Duport papers in the Cambridge University Library with the annotation '(Fiction?)' (i). In *The Glass of Time* (2008), which is the sequel to *The Meaning of Night*, the same character writes:

⁹ Alasdair Gray was Writer in Residence at Glasgow University (1977-79) and he became a Professor of the Creative Writing programme at Glasgow and Strathclyde Universities in 2001.

¹⁰ Although the late Michael Cox (d. 2009) was not an academic, he intended 'to pursue an academic career' and 'his scholarly familiarity with the 19th-century literary canon [...] was impressive' (Michael Cox Obituary, 2009). Cox wrote a biography of the Victorian ghost writer M.R. James (1983), which was followed by several anthologies of Victorian short stories for Oxford University Press (1983-1997) before he wrote the two neo-Victorian novels, *The Meaning of Night* (2006) and *The Glass of Time* (2008).

The manuscript of 'The Glass of Time' is held in the Houghton Library at Harvard. Although, like the supposedly confessional text published by the present editor in 2006 as *The Meaning of Night*, it purports to be a record of actual events connected with the ancient, and now defunct, Duport family, of Evenwood in Northamptonshire, it is firmly novelistic in character and should be read first and foremost as a work of fiction, or at least as highly fictionalised autobiography (ix).

J.J. Antrobus's conclusions about the authenticity of the text, however, are problematised in the novel. Take for example the position of 'Professor of Post-Authentic Victorian Fiction', which is surely ironic in the sense that it mocks other forms of academic ideology prefixed by that notorious marker 'post', such as Post-Modernism, Post-Feminism and Post-Impressionism. In the made-up discipline of 'Post-Authentic Victorian Fiction', both 'Authentic Victorian Fiction' and authenticity itself are questioned or challenged, just like Modernism, Feminism and Impressionism too undergo critical interrogation. Of course, one cannot take the oxymoronic 'Authentic Victorian Fiction' seriously, and the 'Post' tagged onto it is even more absurd. It suggests that the idea of authenticity belongs to a previous time or that it is no longer meaningful to speak of it without knowing re-evaluation. Having the 'Professor of Post-Authentic Victorian Fiction' to accredit the manuscripts as fictional on the surface serves to consolidate the authenticity of the documents; they are discredited on one level (they are not factual) and affirmed on another (they are *really* from the nineteenth century). But the entire discourse of 'Post-Authentic Victorian Fiction' raises suspicions not only about the manuscripts, but also the professor's expertise and his ability to accurately authenticate them.

The trope of preceding the found documents in *The Meaning of Night* and *The Glass of Time* with a note written by a professor is of course a practice borrowed from academia and publishing. Critical editions of literary classics often include a scholarly introduction and sometimes also explanatory notes throughout the texts.¹¹ The attachment of someone from the university almost always acts as a testament of the text's cultural importance and merit, if not its canonicity, as discussed in Chapter Two. With this in mind, the 'Afterword' in Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt's *Dracula the Un-Dead*, written by the *Dracula* scholar Elizabeth Miller, is worth some attention.¹² The addition of the 'Afterword' in *Dracula the Un-Dead* is

¹¹ In *The Meaning of Night* and *The Glass of Time*, the 'editor' intervenes occasionally through footnotes.

¹² The two authors of *Dracula the Un-Dead* emphasise Miller's academic achievement in addition to her role as a *Dracula* authority: 'Elizabeth Miller, Professor Emerita (Memorial University of Newfoundland) is recognised internationally for her expertise on *Dracula*, both the novel and the historical figure. Coeditor (with Robert Eighteen-Bisang) of *Bram Stoker's Notes for Dracula: A Facsimile Edition*, she has also published *A Dracula Handbook* and the award-winning *Dracula: Sense & Nonsense*. She lectures regularly on both sides of the

not only a generic trope (the use of editor's notes and afterwords are fairly common within neo-Victorian literature), it is also the authors' attempt to cannibalise some of Miller's academic credential and give weight to their own text. Whatever the exact motivation for this move, whether the authors are insecure about their novel or are overly confident to the point of arrogance, the 'Afterword' seems designed to suggest that their novel is as worthy as other gothic classics, particularly its 'prequel' *Dracula*.

On the whole, it seems academics fare poorly as framing and authenticating devices in neo-Victorian fiction. We are reminded of W.B. Yeats's poem 'The Scholars' (1919), which critically portrays aged scholars who live off editing and annotating the poetry of the young men of a previous generation, the Romantics:

Old, learned, respectable bald heads
Edit and annotate the lines
that young men, tossing on their beds,
Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear. (L2-L6)

The scholars, although 'learned, respectable', are presented as comical. They are contrasted with the young and agile Romantic poets, whose feelings and life experiences fizz with freedom and creativity. Later in the poem, we are told that the old, uninspired scholars 'All think what other people think' (L9), suggesting that they lack originality and are stuck in a kind of groupthink. The poem, written in the early twentieth century, follows a long tradition of scholars as antithesis of youth and creation.¹³ In the neo-Victorian novels discussed in this section, this negative aura is a spectre haunting the academic characters, who like Yeats's 'bald heads', also edit and annotate others' work. While the scholars in the poem feed on the verse of the young Romantics, those in the contemporary novels edit Victorian prose. In both cases, the intellectuals rely on others' creativity to create their own work. Of course, it can be argued that the scholars' expertise is acknowledged and even assumed by the neo-Victorian writers; otherwise, academics would not be used to authenticate the fictional found manuscripts. We are reminded of Victorian pornography which has been republished in recent years with 'an antiquarian gloss and a thin veneer of scholarship' (Kaplan, 2007:86).

Atlantic and has participated in numerous radio and television documentaries. At the World Dracula Congress in Romania in 1995, Dr. Miller was granted the honorary title of "Baroness of the House of Dracula." Her Web sites—Dracula's homepage and the Dracula Research Centre—are both accessible through www.blooferland.com' (397-8).

¹³ In Stephanie Bolster's poem 'Portrait of Alice, Annotated', discussed in the Introduction, Alice's annotators are also portrayed as the antithesis of youth, in the sense that they reduce the young heroine into a lifeless object.

The contemporary writers are also using the academic characters as accomplices for their own literary hoaxes. Modern-day readers are not innocent and easily deceived – they know they are not reading a Victorian manuscript, but only a *neo*-Victorian one and that the manuscripts are not *found*, but *concocted*. Because readers today are too knowing to believe that the found manuscripts are genuine (compared, for example, with the first readers of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* [1764], many of whom reportedly believed that the manuscript was real),¹⁴ the scholars who discuss the Victorian manuscripts as though they are real appear to be laughable, misled, untrustworthy. That fact that in these novels, the scholarly characters are somehow anachronistic or even irrelevant reflects unfavourably on their real-life counterparts.

III. Researching the Victorian

Apart from using academics as peripheral characters, neo-Victorian novelists also use graduate students – trainee academics who research nineteenth-century writers – as primary protagonists. It is perhaps predictable that the figure of the research student has a recurrent role in the neo-Victorian genre, as novelists tend to cannibalise their own experience and many of them have been postgraduate students. Graduate characters occupy a marginal or liminal position in the academic world. They are ready to enter it should they complete their research work with flourish but are likely to be eternally excluded from it should they fail. It is particularly interesting, then, that a number of these novels choose to frustrate the characters' entry into the world of scholarship by having them leave the university environment altogether before the end of the novel, either by their own choice or by force of circumstances. This recalls the formula of successful University novels that Janice Rossen describes, 'many of the best University novels are about someone leaving academe at the end of the book' (qtd. in Showalter, 2005:29). By turning their backs on the academic world, the characters seem to provide a symbolic rejection of scholarship generally. We are also reminded of the Victorian scholar Casaubon from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, who famously fails to complete his monumental and unrealistic project, *The Key to All Mythologies*. Thus, neo-Victorian novels centring on research students look back to Eliot's text in their portrayal of failed scholarly characters, making them all in one way or other Casaubon's descendents.

¹⁴ 'The first readers of the novel [*The Castle of Otranto*] were willing to believe that the work was a translation of a medieval manuscript' (qtd. in Frank, 2003:259).

In Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2008[2006]), which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, scholarly pursuit only appears in the very last pages of the novel but this brief sketch is revealing.¹⁵ Dickens's *Great Expectations* is an important intertext of Jones's novel. A tattered copy of the Victorian book is used by Mr Watts, the only white man left on the blockaded and war-torn island of Bougainville in the early 1990s, to teach Matilda, the thirteen-year-old protagonist, and her classmates. Dickens's novel provides Matilda with a glimpse of another life and 'becomes her bible and her escape route' (Gribble, 2008:190). That Jones has Mr Watts announce to the class that *Great Expectations* is 'the greatest novel' and Charles Dickens is 'the greatest writer of the nineteenth century' (18) not only betrays his admiration for the novel but also his conscious use of the Victorian legacy in his own fiction. In Jones's imagination, *Great Expectations* is transformed from a static text to 'portable property' that is a 'material object, source of story, moral and imaginative stimulus, bearer of cultural capital' (Gribble, 2008:186-187).

Later, after the traumatic events on the island, including the killing of Matilda's mother and Mr Watts (the latter is fed to the village pigs) and her subsequent reunion with her father in Australia and graduation from the University of Queensland, Matilda arrives in London to embark on her graduate research on Dickens. She intends to write a thesis on Dickens's orphans (199) but her research disillusiones her perception of both *Great Expectations* and the Victorian author. In particular, it is difficult for Matilda to comprehend how a man who wrote so sympathetically about orphans could be so cold-hearted to his own children, exiling them emotionally and geographically one by one. She also realises that she, like many others, has been using Dickens to suit her own needs. Her research stalls, because she feels uninspired, void of 'any fresh material' (215). After putting aside 'that pile of paper known as my thesis' for 'too long' (215, 216), we are told that one morning Matilda wakes up and '[takes] the top sheet of paper from 'Dickens' Orphans', turn[s] it over, and [writes], 'Everyone called him Pop Eye'' (216). 'Everyone called him Pop Eye' is in fact the very first sentence of *Mister Pip*; the novel thus circles back and in a way ends where it begins. Matilda's turning over the page of her thesis is an ingenious symbolic act: she turns her back on academic research.¹⁶

¹⁵ Lloyd Jones has an unusual relationship with academia. He did not graduate from Victorian University because he refused to pay outstanding library fines but was later given an honorary doctorate by the same institution. On the 'The Book Show', broadcasted by Australia's RadioNational, host Ramona Koval pointed out that it was through his fiction that Jones 'finally got academic recognition' (Koval and Jones, 2009).

¹⁶ Apart from abandoning her graduate research, Matilda also turns her back on London, one of the centres of world education. At the end, she chooses to go home, presumably the island of Bougainville: 'I had decided to leave England' (217) and 'I would try where Pip had failed. I would try to return home' (219).

Instead of continuing her academic studies, she decides to pen an autobiographical account of her life and tell her and her mother's story in Bougainville 'as [it] happened' (217). With this decision, Matilda transforms from a would-be-scholar to a writer, although her life biography's appearance on the back of her academic work might suggest that her reflections and the study of Dickens are somehow interdependent. But Matilda rejects both the Victorian author's fiction and her research. She dismisses Dickens's characters – 'They are too loud, they are grotesques' (217) – and comes to believe that life stories provide the only authentic and meaningful narratives. For example, she finds solace in her father's unmediated reaction to her report of her mother's death: 'When I told my father of my mum's death he broke down and wept. That is when I learnt there is a place for embellishment after all. But it belongs to life – not to literature' (217).

However, as readers are aware, *Mister Pip* is not really Matilda's autobiographical account but fiction created by Jones. That is to say, while in the narrative Matilda abandons scholarship and embraces factual reportage, what is actually rejected in the novel is scholarly endeavour; what is accepted, in the end, is fiction – fictional biography. *Mister Pip*, then, suggests that ultimately, Victorian cultural legacies such as Dickens's *Great Expectations* are best used to refashion new stories, address contemporary anxieties and inspire dialogues relevant to the present age, things that *Mister Pip* achieves by 'hybridising the narratives of black and white races to create a new and resonant fable' (Laing, 2007). Although the academic setting is brief in *Mister Pip*, it speaks clearly against scholarly study and favours fiction as the heir to Victorian cultural heritage.

Similarly, in Justine Picardie's *Daphne* (2009[2008]), the PhD student Jane (she is only named once in the entire book)¹⁷ also abandons her thesis on the Brontës and Daphne du Maurier at the end of the novel.¹⁸ The reason she gives is 'I don't want to try to marshal my

¹⁷ This only occurrence of her name appears on p. 382 of *Daphne* when the contemporary protagonist remembers what her mother once told her as they stood on the cliffs by St Catherine's Castle: 'Don't keep looking down, sweetheart. Look out to sea – it goes all the way to the sky. Just look how far you can see, Jane... You can see forever today'.

The name 'Jane' recalls the ur-text *Jane Eyre*, which is the model for *Rebecca* and to some extent *Daphne*. In *Daphne*, Jane is married to a husband emotionally haunted by his first wife – resembling a version of the Rochester-Jane-Bertha relationship.

¹⁸ Jane's original idea for her thesis is 'the Brontë's imaginary worlds of childhood, with particular reference to Branwell's influence on Emily and Charlotte' but she also attempts to incorporate du Maurier in the thesis because it is through du Maurier's biography *The Infernal World* (1972) that she has become interested in Branwell.

feelings about Daphne du Maurier into a neat academic theory' (375). Jane is a cannibalistic reader: she has 'devoured' all du Maurier's novels (34, 47) and read Heathcliff, Mr Rochester and Maxim de Winter 'inside out and into myself' (38). Picardie's book alternates between the stories of Jane and du Maurier. The part on du Maurier's writing of Branwell Brontë's biography is the more interesting of the two. In this part of the book, we are also presented with du Maurier's correspondences with the scholar and former curator of the Brontë Museum, Alex Symington. Both du Maurier and Symington want to believe that Branwell was a misunderstood genius and prove that his talent was comparable, if not superior to, his sisters'.

Du Maurier's championing of Branwell is in part driven by her own desire for scholarly recognition. Although she is 'the best-selling author in the country' (164), she is resentful that she is 'generally dismissed with a sneer' (255) by the critics and 'wants to prove herself to be a serious scholar' and 'do something really worthwhile' (164). To this end, she hopes that 'in proving [Branwell] to be a lost genius, she would also prove herself' (20).¹⁹ The fictional du Maurier considers scholarship, then, a superior form of expression to fiction. In the end, she resignedly accepts that Branwell was not in fact a genius: 'his writing talent was not equal to his sister [...] Branwell turns out not to be the man I had hoped him to be' (372). Furthermore, by dedicating her biography of Branwell, *The Infernal World*, to Symington, whose reputation was tarnished due to his theft of Branwell's manuscripts from several collections, du Maurier's book is also tainted. Today, du Maurier is generally remembered as the author of the novel *Rebecca*, which is a kind of adaptation of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, while her scholarly work on Branwell is largely forgotten. This suggests that Picardie presents a triumph of the fictional response to the nineteenth century over scholarly endeavours.

Du Maurier's dual desire for defending Branwell and gaining recognition from the attempt is echoed in Jane, who dreams of becoming famous by 'rescuing Daphne from the

Note both Matilda in *Mister Pip* and Jane in *Daphne* are initially interested in researching aspects of Victorian childhood (Matilda on Dickens's orphans and Jane on 'the Brontë's imaginary worlds of childhood'). The heroines' fixation with childhood hints at their ultimate failure to enter the adult world of scholarship.

¹⁹ Here, du Maurier's opinion of herself echoes A.D. Nuttall's (2003) interpretation of George Eliot's writing career: 'We, looking back at George Eliot, see a major literary artist. She saw someone who had never written, would never write a great work of philosophy or history' (70). Dinah Birch (1999) likewise points to a correspondence between Eliot and 'the arid scholar of *Middlemarch*': 'But when asked to identify the original [of Casaubon], George Eliot would point to her own heart. The journals are a reminder of how conscious she was of the painful prospect of not living up to anticipated greatness'. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (2000[1979]) call this Eliot's 'anxiety of authorship' (502).

misunderstandings of insensitive critics that had obscured her true worth' (82). *Daphne* contains several layers of literary cannibalism: the contemporary student cannibalistically studies du Maurier who in turn researches Branwell. Indeed, in the book, the language used to describe research is suggestive of cannibalism. For example, du Maurier's investigation is likened to 'digging up Branwell's bones' (279) and Symington only occasionally provides her with 'meagre crumbs' of Branwell to work with (301).

By incorporating Daphne du Maurier's first name as her book title (the single-word title is also an obvious nod to du Maurier's *Rebecca*), Picardie adopts a sense of familiarity with the famous writer. It can even be said that in her work, Picardie has *authored* du Maurier. Interestingly, one reviewer of *Daphne* comments that Picardie has 'lived, breathed, eaten and drunk her heroine' (Rubin, 2008), a remark that could equally apply to the novelist's own treatment of du Maurier and Branwell. In the figure of Symington, Picardie also provides us with a modern-day Casaubon. As is the case with Eliot's character, Symington is described as 'old' (141) and just like the Victorian scholar who fails to finish his masterpiece, Symington, too, is unable to complete a biography of Branwell. He realises that he is a marginal character 'reduced to a lowly assistant to Daphne' (261) and he dies before the publication of du Maurier's *The Infernal World*. With the trio of characters Jane, du Maurier and Symington, *Daphne* suggests a collective failure of scholarly responses to the nineteenth century. While Jane and Symington do not see their research through to completion, du Maurier manages to finish hers but is little rewarded for her effort.

Like Matilda and Jane, Sallie Declan, the heroine in A.N. Wilson's *A Jealous Ghost* (2005), an adaptation of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), also fails to finish her research. At the start of the book, Sallie, a lonely American doctoral student studying at University College London, 'was leaving her university world, her library world' (1). We learn she is taking a break from her thesis on James, which has a strong focus on his most famous ghost story and contains an opening chapter provisionally titled 'Metonym [sic] and Anonym' (51).²⁰ During her hiatus, Sallie becomes nanny to two young children in Staverton, a remote

²⁰ Coincidentally, Alan Hollinghurst's Booker Prize-winning *The Line of Beauty* (2004) also has a main character who like Sallie is writing a PhD thesis on Henry James at University College London. Nick Guest, the protagonist in *The Line of Beauty*, begins his dissertation on James's style but his research is not the main focus of the novel nor is it much discussed. As Cora Kaplan (1997) writes, '[H]e gets distracted from it in his pursuit of pleasure, in his case gay, interracial, cross-class sex' (74). That Nick sidelines his academic study in favour of a Jamesian exploration of lifestyle is perhaps the novelist's comment on the ineffectuality of scholarship to truly understand a Victorian writer's aesthetics.

country house in Kent and the supposed inspiration for the mansion in *The Turn of the Screw*. She quickly fancies herself in love with Charles Masters ('Masters', of course, is a nod to 'The Master' in the original as well as James himself), the father of her wards, Frances and Michael. The country house setting, the makeup of its occupants (two young children and a housekeeper named Gloria) and their names (Frances, Michael and Gloria are reminiscent of Flora, Miles and Mrs Grose in James's tale) not only contribute to but also strengthen Sallie's and the reader's illusion that she is reliving the experience of or communing with James's unnamed governess, who like Sallie also takes the journey from London to the country house. Sallie identifies with the governess, having an 'uncanny sense that she was becoming the central figure in that story which she had been obsessively contemplating all year' (13). However, when forced to face discrepancies between reality and fiction, her already weak mental health is aggravated. When it becomes clear that the mother of the children, Rosemary (the Miss Jessel figure in the original) is not a ghost (the 'jealous ghost' in the title, although at one point Sallie is herself described as 'a pale ghost' [154]) but is in fact very much alive, Sallie suffers a nervous breakdown and kills Frances, mistaking her for the master's wife. Sallie is sent to a mental institution: 'Now the room was so white. Sky white, tiles white. No colour, no blood, white as terror. You sat for eternity in this place' (185). Despite being incarcerated, she still obsesses about her thesis: 'one day, she would be strong enough to stir herself and get down to writing something useful about *Turn*' (185). But we know it is unlikely that Sallie will resume her PhD research anytime soon. The end of *A Jealous Ghost* cunningly cannibalises the first sentence of James's original, encouraging readers to further associate the story of the strayed research student with that of the Victorian governess.

Throughout *A Jealous Ghost*, we are given insights into Sallie's research and contemplation during her stay at the country house. This way, the author A.N. Wilson, who according to Jason Cowley (2005) is 'a daring highwire scholar operating without the safety net of the academy', is able to offer explicit analysis of *The Turn of the Screw*, thereby collapsing the categories of fiction and scholarship and providing a self-reflexive comment on the cannibalistic relationship between neo-Victorian fiction and criticism. For example, Sallie wonders if James's story, which centres on a young governess and two children, can be read as 'a paradigm of child abuse' with 'paedophile men' gathering around the fireside to share 'cheap thrills' (95-6). She also believes that the innocent Flora and Miles have been morally corrupted by the servants at Bly, particularly Peter Quint and Miss Jessel (96-7), an interpretation not uncommon in the scholarship on the text and in fact corroborated by

James's own diary.²¹ But perhaps Wilson's unambiguous portrayal of Sallie as insane and physically violent, given that she is the equivalent of James's governess, is his most blatant comment on *The Turn of the Screw* in which the heroine's mental state and reliability is one of the text's most captivating indeterminacies. *A Jealous Ghost* is a hybrid, part-fiction and part-literary exegesis of the Victorian text.²²

At one point, we are told that Sallie 'had now read it [James's book] so often, and dwelt so much upon the rival theories and interpretations in the second literature, that she had begun to take for granted, hence to forget, the simple fact that it was meant [...] to be "a scare"' (95). Indeed, there are so many contradictory interpretations of *The Turn of the Screw* in circulation that Dieter Freundlieb (1984) labels this phenomenon 'an intellectual scandal' (79). In her early studies, Sallie is particularly influenced by poststructuralist theories such as those championed by Foucault, Todorov and Barthes (23) and she distrusts Darwinian, Marxist and biographical readings of texts (53). On one occasion she quotes Baudrillard's *Simulations* (1983) to argue that James writes *The Turn of the Screw* in such a way that readers cannot tell whether the events recounted by the governess actually happened or were merely products of the young woman's imagination (51-2). In the article 'The Haunting of Henry James: Jealous Ghosts, Affinities, and *The Others*' (2009), Ann Heilmann suggests that Sallie is undone by her 'poststructuralism's dismissal of all truth claims' – 'Literary theory, in Sallie's case, literally turns into an instrument of execution' (119). Evoking Tzvetan Todorov, Stanley Fish and Roland Barthes, Sallie believes that 'we make our own text' and in her version, 'Rosie was dead' (170-1). This explains why Sallie intends to live out *her* text by killing Rosie (even if she kills Frances by mistake instead). In *A Jealous Ghost*, then, academic pursuit is made undesirable, psychologically damaging and even deadly. The book is both a rejection and critique of the scholarly study of well-known Victorian texts and, through Sallie's experience, a morose warning against it. Ironically, when Sallie is kept in the hospital, her supervisor visits her and says, 'Obviously, mm, mmm, now could be a time for some more general reading around the subject' (165). The hypocrisy and cynicism in this advice is pungent: that Sallie should continue her PhD research during confinement, even though her supervisor is well aware that she will likely never finish it.

²¹ 'For at least a century conventional wisdom had held that servants were corrupters of children' (Schrero 1981:262).

²² Charles Palliser's neo-Victorian novel, *The Quincunx* (1989), similarly appropriates literary exegesis. According to Palliser, his intention of the book was not to passively imitate Victorian novels but to recontextualise them, and 'to offer a critique like an academic work, but in the form of another novel' (qtd. in Coe, 1994:21).

In the novels discussed so far, the research students study existing Victorian texts and authors, but in *The End of Mr Y* (2008[2006]), Scarlett Thomas invents the Victorian writer Thomas E. Lumas for her twenty-first-century protagonist Ariel Manto to research.²³ Broadly speaking, Ariel is interested in ‘experiments of the minds’ – her PhD supervisor suggests that she looks at nineteenth-century figures such as Thomas Hardy, Alfred Tennyson and Charles Darwin as well as Einstein’s theory of relativity, Edwin A. Abbot’s *Flatland* and thought experiments such as Schrödinger’s cat. However, Ariel is particularly fascinated by Lumas’s 1893 novel *The End of Mr Y* (the real-life and fictional novels share one title and their authors have the same name ‘Thomas’), a supposedly cursed book which causes its author and all its readers to die. Allegedly and enigmatically, there is only one copy of this book in the world, which is kept in a German bank vault. Lumas’s *The End of Mr Y* follows Mr Y’s discovery of a curious tincture that allows him to journey across time and space by occupying the consciousness of other living beings. In the end, he chooses this alternative mind world, called ‘Troposphere’, over the real one and in effect voluntarily commits physical suicide, hence the ‘end’ in the title.

At intervals throughout her novel, Thomas includes sections from the ostensibly nineteenth-century text, which are written by Thomas but signed Lumas. This, and the fact that both Thomas and Lumas write a book with the same title, suggests a communion between the contemporary author and her nineteenth-century invented counterpart, a communion which also mirrors the entire novel as it contains both contemporary and Victorian styles in one body. Despite the fact that employing real-life personae in neo-Victorian fiction is a convention of the genre and lends authenticity to texts, Thomas does not use a historical figure but instead creates her own Victorian celebrity. This is perhaps because Lumas is not one person but is, according to Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010), possibly a composite of several Victorian models: Abbott, author of *Flatland* (1884), the mathematician and poet James Clerk Maxwell and Samuel Butler, whose *Erewhon* (1872) and *Note-Books* are referred to in the novel a number of times (191-192).²⁴ This move allows Thomas to commune with not one but several male Victorian figures. However, that Samuel Butler may be the main source for Lumas is hinted at through a pair of suggestive names in the text. ‘Lumas’ is almost a palindrome of ‘Samuel’, just as Butler’s *Erewhon* is almost a palindrome

²³ Scarlett Thomas currently teaches creative writing at the University of Kent. Her first three novels feature an English literature lecturer.

²⁴ In their essay ‘Doing It with Mirrors, or Tricks of the Trade: Neo-Victorian Metatextual Magic’ (2010), Heilmann and Llewellyn primarily discuss the metafictional nature of *The End of Mr Y* (190-201).

of 'Nowhere' (a theme present throughout the book, especially the Troposphere into which both Mr Y and Ariel disappear). The name 'Lumas', then, more powerfully recalls Butler (or the title of his famous work) than the other Victorian writers. Via the invented name 'Thomas E. Lumas', the contemporary author (Scarlett Thomas) communes with the Victorian critic and novelist (*Samuel Butler*).²⁵

While the fiction-within-the-fiction version of *The End of Mr Y* charts its eponymous character's exploration and final disappearance into the other world, Thomas's *The End of Mr Y* is itself a thought experiment novel which contemplates postmodernist, poststructuralist and semiotic ideas of illusion and reality, sometimes through the lenses of and works by Victorian philosophers and writers, including the fictional Lumas. Because the protagonist of her novel is a PhD student researching 'experiments of the minds', Thomas has many opportunities to discuss different theories and literary works about the boundaries of reality. Charles Baudrillard, Martin Heidegger, Samuel Butler, Charles Darwin, Jacques Derrida, Thomas Hardy, Edgar Allan Poe and H.G. Wells, among others, are referred to in the text. Ariel, however, prefers Victorian thought: 'The nineteenth-century crowd were wrong, on the whole, but we're somehow doing worse than that. We're now living with the uncertainty principle and the incompleteness theorem and philosophers who say that the world has become a simulacrum – a copy without an original' (44). Here, as in Wilson's *A Jealous Ghost*, there is an ambivalence towards contemporary philosophical and literary ideas. A similar scepticism can also be found in D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre*, in which 'contemporary scholarship in general and women's studies in particular are derided' (Gutleben, 2001:182) as well as in Graham Swift's *Ever After*, where academics' 'lengthy critical discussions' and 'erudite commentaries' (70) are dismissed by the main protagonist. Neo-Victorian novels featuring academic characters, then, seem to repudiate and undermine contemporary scholarly methods and to some extent retreat into the certainties and solaces of the Victorian world.

²⁵ The use of invented Victorian celebrities as stand-ins for historical figures is also seen in A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), in which the fictional Victorian poet Randolph Henry Ash is 'a composite portrait of Matthew Arnold, Tennyson, George Eliot's husband G.H. Lewes and, most importantly, Robert Browning' and Christabel LaMotte and her work 'are inspired by nineteenth-century poets such as Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Brontë, Christina Rossetti and Elisabeth Barrett Browning' as well as 'the British suffragette Christabel Pankhurst and the heroine of Coleridge's unfinished poem "Christabel"' (Franken, 2001: 87, 88). We also recall the use of Alfred and Dorothea Gibson in Gaynold Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) to represent Charles and Catherine Dickens. By creating new monikers for the Victorian celebrities, the novelists may feel that they have more latitude in fictionalising aspects of their lives.

Ariel delights that her reading of *The End of Mr Y* is untainted by a plethora of adaptations (because the book is scarce): ‘It’s a strange experience, coming to such an old book without the benefit of a thousand TV adaptations and study guides and reading groups’ (55). This is both a comment on contemporary treatment of canonical Victorian texts and a reflection of Thomas’s own choice of creating a new Victorian writer rather than appropriating known ones – her book is not marred by pre-existing interpretations. In the context of the current discussion, what is particularly interesting is Ariel’s response to Lumas’s *The End of Mr Y* and her research progress. Predictably, she cannot resist reading the book despite its curse and she follows Mr Y’s and Lumas’s example to create the potion and journey into the Troposphere. She thus metaphorically drinks the Victorian past and becomes in some sense a neo-Victorian adaptation of Lumas’s *The End of Mr Y* by repeating the pattern of the fictional Victorian author and his character.

In the end, Ariel, accompanied by her lover Adam, a former priest and a theology lecturer, enters Lumas’s mind and makes him destroy the manuscript of *The End of Mr Y* – the secret embedded in the book would be too dangerous for mankind if it fell into evil hands. In this moment, Ariel communes with her research subject and Victorian precursor, albeit briefly, and at the same time destroys his powerful and haunting text. Put another way, she communes with the Victorian past in order to annihilate it. This perhaps provides the ultimate example of the neo-Victorian’s aggressive ambivalence towards the past. After the mission is complete, Ariel decides not to depart the Troposphere: ‘I can’t get what I want outside of here [...] I want the knowledge I can find in here. I want to know how it all started, and what consciousness is’ (500). By leaving behind the contemporary physical world to travel forever with Adam in the alternate universe, feeding on mind after mind, Ariel has abandoned her earthly PhD studies, which do not satisfy her desire for first-hand knowledge. Their decision to drink the potion together and search for knowledge provides an obvious echo of the story of Adam and Eve, a reference which is literally manifested in the Epilogue. By choosing to live in the Troposphere, Ariel undertakes the ultimate form of intellectual cannibalism by living exclusively off the minds of others. This coincides with Suzanne Keen (2001)’s characterisation of successful knowledge-seekers: ‘An academic outsider makes a better truth-finder than a “qualified” researcher’ (30). Ariel’s decision is also in one crucial sense very similar to Matilda’s in *Mister Pip*. Both heroines reject scholarship, in particular, Victorian scholarship, for a different path. While one goes back to her original world (Matilda), the other goes to an unknown but seemingly infinite one (Ariel).

The neo-Victorian writers discussed in this section collectively have their heroines leave the world of scholarship,²⁶ pointing to the writers' general mistrust of contemporary academic pursuits. The student characters all abandon their research – they are unwilling or unable to continue or they find scholarship unfulfilling. In their failures, they recall the unsuccessful Victorian scholar, Casaubon, and we see that contemporary authors are using a Victorian trope to critique modern academia. Finally, because of the very form (they are fiction, not scholarship), these novels seem implicitly to endorse fiction as a preferred means to inherit the Victorian legacy, rather than academic research.

IV. Inheriting the Victorian

If the secondary academic characters and research students discussed in the previous sections can be seen as a commentary on Victorian scholarship today, the academics who take centre stage and whose research features prominently in the plot are even more revealing about the complicated relationship between scholarship and the nineteenth century. In the rest of the chapter, I will investigate two such novels: A.S. Byatt's Booker Prize-winning *Possession* (1990) and Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992), both of which use academics as the main protagonists.²⁷

The two books share a number of similarities in characterisation and structure. Both novels are set partly on a university campus and feature academics in both lead and secondary roles. In *Possession*, the main characters are two twentieth-century scholars of Victorian poetry, Roland Michell and Maud Bailey, but the novel is full of academic characters, as Sam Jordison (2009) remarks in the *Guardian*, 'It sends up academics of all stamps (dusty,

²⁶ The three protagonists discussed in this section are all female. If George Eliot's representation of the failed scholar Casaubon can be viewed as an 'extremely subversive portrait of male authority' (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000[1979]:502), then the contemporary writers' choice of female trainee academics is worth reflection. In Victorian literature, most scholars are male, which mirrors the gender bias in the academic world and in society at that time. The female figures in the neo-Victorian novels, then, speak to the changed gender make-up of contemporary academia. The fact that these females all choose to depart the university also forms a contrast with notions of the university found in Victorian novels, in which leaving or not attending might have detrimental effects on the characters. In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), for example, Jude is denied entry to the colleges, which '[held] back the spread of adult education to the working class' in order to protect 'the overcrowded professions' (Ingham, 2002:xiii). This experience negatively impacts his life and worldview. In the contemporary novels, however, the beginning scholars willingly give up their academic pursuits, an act which could be read as either a form of female empowerment or a slightly retrograde view of women's academic aptitude and perseverance.

²⁷ Both A.S. Byatt and Graham Swift use academics in their other novels. For example, Byatt's *Still Life* (1985) and Swift's *Waterland* (1983). Byatt lectured at University College London between 1972 and 1983, while Swift has an English degree from Cambridge and studied for a PhD at University of York for three years (Marriott, 2009).

thrusting, shy, ambitious, greedy, gender-obsessed, sex-obsessed, celibate)'. Likewise, *Ever After* features a number of academic characters, including the protagonist Bill Unwin,²⁸ a fellow in a Cambridge college and his academic rival Michael Potter, who functions as an antagonist in the story. Beyond the similarity of the characters, *Possession* and *Ever After* share similar plot structures, particularly in their use of connected twentieth-century and nineteenth-century plot lines. Sally Shuttleworth (2001) writes that *Ever After* seems to follow the pattern of *Possession*, in which the 'nineteenth- and twentieth-century stories intertwine and the recovery and interrogation of the past forms the basis of the central protagonists' own attempts to construct their identity' (150). Robin Gilmour (2000) likewise suggests that 'It is possible that Swift may have been influenced by Byatt's *Possession* (*Ever After* was published two years after Byatt's novel) since both are novels in which the central figure attempts to uncover the secret life of a Victorian ancestor or artist; and both provide pastiches of the Victorian artefacts into which their protagonists research' (195). In the interconnected stories, both novels attempt to construct a relationship with history. They employ the premise of parallel lives and 'events in the contemporary story [...] eerily reproduce the past' (Underwood, 2004:1). In *Possession*, the love affair of the two twentieth-century scholars, Michell and Bailey, is mirrored in the hitherto concealed affair they unveil between their Victorian research subjects, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte.²⁹ These discoveries are made through a careful reading of the long-lost letters of the Victorian writers and their meaning-loaded poetry as well as the journals and other written correspondence of their Victorian contemporaries. The centrality of the university environment and documents is echoed in *Ever After*. In it, the twentieth-century character Bill Unwin gains knowledge of the life of his Victorian ancestor, the engineer and surveyor Matthew Pearce, through reading his Notebooks.

Possession and *Ever After* focus not only on the Victorian characters' published texts but also their personal papers, which reflects our celebrity culture and intense obsession with the private documents and affairs of well-known people. While the previous chapters discussed

²⁸ 'Unwin' is possibly a reference to Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), in which orphans are named alphabetically: 'We name our fondlings in alphabetical order. The last was a S,—Swubble, I named him. This was a T,—Twist, I named *him*. The next one comes will be Unwin, and the next Vilkins. I have got names ready made to the end of the alphabet, and all the way through it again, when we come to Z' (17, emphasis original). Does Swift suggest that Bill Unwin, who is at the beginning of *Ever After* also an orphan, comes after *Oliver Twist*?

²⁹ As mentioned in fn. 26 above, the two Victorian poets in *Possession* are veiled versions of Robert Browning and Christina Rossetti.

the incorporation of existing nineteenth-century elements – important figure, text, historical feature – in neo-Victorian novels, Byatt and Swift go one step further by creating their own Victorian texts and celebrities (Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte in *Possession* and Matthew Pearce in *Ever After*) for their modern-day academics to cannibalise.³⁰ In *Possession*, additionally, the fictional Victorian characters mingle freely with well-known historical figures. In this act, we may see a subconscious desire on the part of Byatt to commune with her Victorian predecessors. By having her nineteenth-century creations interact with historical people, she may be writing out her own desire to be among the Victorian greats. A similar, albeit much more explicit, case of this process is evident in the representation of the Brontë scholar Miranda Stevenson in D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* (2000), discussed in Chapter Three. In that book, Stevenson identifies herself as Charlotte Brontë (69, 76). Likewise, Howard Jacobson in *Peeping Tom* writes about a Thomas Hardy scholar who becomes the Victorian author in his dreams.

Possession and *Ever After* also emphasise the physicality of the Victorian documents, and in so doing reveal some of the cannibalistic elements of our relationship with the past. In *Possession*, Michell discovers two previously unknown letters by his research subject Randolph Henry Ash while reading Ash's copy of Vico's *Principj di Scienza Nuova* in the London Library: 'Under page 300 lay two folded complete sheets of writing paper. Roland opened these delicately. They were both letters in Ash's flowing hand, both headed with his Great Russell Street address and dated, June 21st' (5). The precise page number, the description of the sheets' condition ('folded' and 'complete') and Ash's handwriting and letterhead all lend a sense of authenticity and materiality to the resurrected letters. For a discussion of cannibalism, what is telling about this discovery is that it is bracketed by two food-related descriptions. Before he notices the letters, Michell is hungry: he 'meditated on the tiresome and bewitching endlessness of the quest for knowledge. Here he sat, recuperating a dead man's reading, timing his exploration by the library clock and the faint constriction of his belly' (4). After he steals the letters and slips them in his own *Oxford Selected Ash*, Michell is sated, and has 'forgotten about his lunch' (8). The academic has found nourishment in the past, in its knowledge and its material documents. In *Ever After*, the

³⁰ Byatt's successful imitation of Victorian style in *Possession*, which draws on her intimate knowledge of the nineteenth century, has been universally praised. One reviewer, for example, comments, 'The most dazzling aspect of *Possession* is Ms. Byatt's canny invention of letters, poems and diaries from the 19th century. She quotes whole vast poems by Ash and LaMotte, several of which struck me, anyway, as highly plausible versions of Browning and Rossetti and are beautiful poems on their own' (Parini, 1990).

physicality of Victorian documents is not seen so much as food, but as a way of communing with history. Unwin is enthralled with the materiality of Pearce Notebooks: ‘when I open their pages, I open, I touch the pages that he once touched. I occupy, as it were, his phantom skin’ (46). Here, the physical contact with the Victorian documents makes Unwin feel that he is in communion with his ancestor, that he is under his skin.

In both *Possession* and *Ever After*, the metaphor of Victorian ancestors and contemporary descendents takes centre stage. Want of familial association with eminent Victorians leads Byatt and Swift to create fictional ancestors and descendents. The metaphor of familial relationships in their books is literalised and turns into a reality. That is to say, through a deliberate choice of plot and characterisation, the novels encourage an understanding of familial connectedness so that the seemingly metaphorical interpretation of the link between past and present becomes the very fabric of the texts. The authors’ own desire to be associated with nineteenth-century celebrities is also manifest in the way they represent certain contemporary academic characters. These characters are blood-relations of the famous Victorians they are researching, presented as legitimate heirs to the keenly-sought historical documents (Ash and LaMotte’s correspondence in *Possession* and Pearce’s Notebooks in *Ever After*).

This familial setting also leads to another related story line: the inheritance plot. This plot has a long history in fiction. Jo Alyson Parker writes in *The Author’s Inheritance* (1998) that it was ‘prevalent’ in many eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century texts (4) and in fact, ‘an integral part of the English novel in general’ (9). In her book, Parker associates the inheritance plot with the plot of authorship, specifically, she examines ‘the plot of authorship that Fielding and Austen develop within their key works, a plot that is linked implicitly with the inheritance plots’ (9). I believe something similar can be seen in neo-Victorian novels; the inheritance plot is connected, however, not with the plot of authorship but with the idea of proper heirs to the Victorian cultural heritage. In both *Possession* and *Ever After*, documents replace real estate or money as the items inherited.³¹ Indeed, as Hilary M. Schor (2000) writes, ‘literature constitutes the “real” property’ (236). The Victorian paper items in Byatt’s and

³¹ This does not mean that the ancestral home, often central to the Victorian inheritance plot, is completely dispensed with in neo-Victorian fiction. See, for example, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn’s chapter, ‘Memory, Mourning, Misfortune: Ancestral Houses and (Literary) Inheritances’ (33-65) in their *Neo-Victorianism* (2011), which discusses the ancestral mansion as a metaphor of ‘(dis)inheritance and mourning’ (35).

Swift's novels provide a literal example of the idea of literary inheritance. Neo-Victorian novels such as *Possession* and *Ever After* use the inheritance plot self-reflexively to comment on and thematise their own literary and power genealogy, creativity and kinship. By making the connection between documents and inheritance explicit, the inheritance plot is interpreted both literally and figuratively, as both tangible items (such as diaries and lost manuscripts) and intangible literary heritage are passed down from a previous generation.

In these novels, the updated inheritance plot, especially the use of past documents as inheritances, provides a postmodernist turn on the traditional plot. In postmodernist discourse, the primacy of texts is repeatedly stressed, or as Fredric Jameson (1991) has it: history 'is inaccessible to us except in textual or narrative form' (4). Linda Hutcheon (1988) also writes of 'a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces – be they literary or historical' (125). The use of documents in neo-Victorian novels interprets this 'textual' nature of history literally by displaying historical texts in an attempt to reconstruct a fictional past and by raising the ontological question of whether the past can be accurately reconstructed through the polyphonic and pluralistic texts it left behind. *Possession*, for example, 'formally highlights the textuality of historical representation by ironically echoing earlier texts in a way that is typical of postmodernism' (Holmes, 1994:320). The representation of documents also underscores the idea of intertextuality since the texts and idioms of history and fiction are intertwined and the distinctions between them blurred.

The inheritance plot in *Possession* and *Ever After*, although updated, still expresses the anxieties over 'improper inheritances' so pivotal to its use in past texts. According to Julia Wright (2001), 'improper inheritances of aristocratic property are central to gothic novels from the first of the genre' (80). For example, in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), '[Horace] Walpole's thematic concerns [...] had a great influence on later Gothic fiction, in particular his focus on issues of succession and inheritance' (Punter and Byron, 2004:179). Indeed, later Gothic fiction such as Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1777) also deals with similar issues. The plot in both Walpole's and Reeve's works hinges on the disputed inheritance of an ancestral home. The male protagonists in them, Theodore of Falconara in *The Castle of Otranto* and Edmund Twyford in *The Old English Baron*, are both deprived of their inheritance by antagonists but in the end they successfully reclaim their estates and justice is restored. The question of rightful inheritance in *The Castle of Otranto* is often seen as reflecting eighteenth-century concerns about the rise of the middle class which threatened

aristocratic dominance in society. Likewise, through its inheritance plot *The Old English Baron* restores the centrality of the aristocratic family and stresses ‘the legitimacy of its hero’s status as the nobly born heir to the Castle of Lovel’ (Watt, 1999:2-3). The inheritance plot, integral to some neo-Victorian novels such as Byatt’s and Swift’s, is also used to reflect contemporary anxieties, specifically, the anxiety over the proper inheritance and usage of Victorian texts. As such, the plot provides an analogous framework for interpreting the way neo-Victorian novelists situate themselves in relation to their literary ancestors. Both *Possession* and *Ever After* raise questions about the identity of the legitimate heirs to the ancestors and their documents.

Possession suggests that being ‘literary’ is an important quality for a potential heir of Victorian documents and cultural heritage. This idea is expressed first in an exchange between two characters, the Englishwoman Daisy Wapshott and the American scholar Mortimer Cropper, who aspires to be the ultimate authority on the Victorian poet Randolph Ash. To this end, he not only researches Ash’s work but also collects his private documents and memorabilia, sometimes using unethical means. Wapshott possesses some ‘small letters’ originally written by Ash and sent to his godchild, Sophia, who was the mother of Wapshott’s deceased husband; these are the letters that Cropper hopes to acquire.³² In the conversation between Wapshott and Cropper, we learn that Sophia gave the letters to her son, Rodney (Wapshott’s husband), hoping that ‘he might be the literary one’ because ‘they were letters from a famous poet’ (96). The husband, before his death, in turn had thought of passing the documents to his daughter, ‘In case she was the literary one’ (97). This small episode reveals an important theme of both *Possession* and *Ever After*, that is, the proper inheritance of Victorian cultural remains. Ash’s letters have become a kind of heirloom for Sophia’s family, and they are passed down from one generation to the next for preservation. Sophia and Rodney have both hoped that one of their descendents would be literary and truly able to appreciate the value of the famous poet’s words. It is as if they know it is only appropriate for someone who is *both* in the family and literary to inherit the documents. As we will see, this theme is also played out in the larger story arc of both *Possession* and *Ever After*.

³² In one scene, Byatt seems to portray Mortimer Cropper as a covert cannibal. He copies Wapshott’s letters illegally by using a self-made photocopier and afterwards ‘tiptoed’ back to his guest room, ‘where, on a glass-topped, *kidney-shaped* dressing-table, doubly skirted in puce satin and white net, he had placed Randolph Ash’s pocket-watch in a *heart-shaped* dish, decorated with gardenias’ (95-96, emphasis added). Apart from the name ‘Mortimer’, which obviously conjures the association of mortuary, the ‘kidney-shaped dressing-table’ and ‘heart-shaped dish’ are suggestive of his symbolic cannibalism.

In *Possession*, Maud Bailey, who turns out to be the great-great-great granddaughter of the two Victorian poets Ash and LaMotte, is the rightful heir of their romantic and hitherto secret correspondence. By making a woman the true inheritor of the documents, Byatt is revising and updating the traditional male inheritance plot for neo-Victorian times. A secondary character comments on Bailey's inheritance: 'How strange for you, Maud, to turn out to be descended from both – how strangely *appropriate* to have been exploring all along the myth – no the truth – of your own origins' (503, emphasis added). Suzanne Keen (2001) also comments that Bailey and her research partner Roland Michell 'most deserve to possess the knowledge of Ash and LaMotte' (32). Their claim to the Victorian documents does not only lie in Bailey's lineage, however, but also in the effectiveness of her and Michell's more traditional scholarly practices, which stress close textual reading, collaboration and a strong sense of curiosity. As Monica Flegel (1998) comments, *Possession* ultimately favours characters such as Bailey and Michell who make 'imaginative and intuitive leaps in order to solve the problems before them, and these leaps illuminate their own lacks' (425). Louisa Hadley (2008) calls this 'a positive and life-enhancing way to engage with the past' (71).

Bailey and Michell's methodology is contrasted with that of the postmodernist, poststructuralist and feminist scholars in the book, who in one way or other challenge the proper succession of the Victorian documents in their own search to decipher the history of Ash and LaMotte. One character, Fergus Wolff (his name is suggestive), whose field is literary theory and who according to Keen (2001) represents 'the theory-mongering younger generation' (38), tries to threaten Bailey into revealing her new findings on Ash and LaMotte: 'if you don't tell me, I shall find out, and consider what I find out to be *my own property*' (256, *Possession*, emphasis added). At certain points, the characters' treatment of and conflict over the documents is portrayed as excessive and even cannibalistic. Sometimes, 'interpretations and glosses proliferate and, monster-like, threaten to devour the primary texts' (Holmes, 1994:320).³³ These scholars, according to Ann Marie Adams (2003), 'fare very ill in this text' (120), because, perhaps inevitably, they are portrayed as unsuitable heirs of the Victorian poets and their texts. They, the 'bad academic readers' (Schor, 2000:236), adopt misguided means of claiming ownership, or as Tim S. Gauthier (2006) suggests, they use 'flawed approaches to the past' (37). In the novel, they are contrasted in particular with

³³ In *Possession*, we are told that a character's footnotes to Randolph Ash's *Complete Poems and Plays* 'engulfed and swallowed the text. They were ugly and ungainly' (28), reminding us of the cannibalistic nature of scholarly annotations discussed in Chapter Two.

Bailey, the true heir (by dint of both her scholarship and lineage). Gutleben (2001), for example, sums up her ancestral claim to the nineteenth-century documents: 'Maud Bailey who is both the literal descendant, and the spiritual heir, the textual exegete and the ideological defendant of a Victorian poetess, is clearly the arch-representative of continuity between Victorian and present times' (192). Byatt, by making a character like herself – that is, a female Victorian scholar and creative – the legitimate heir of the Victorian legacy, we see a clear example of the neo-Victorian's desire for communion with the past and possibly the author's own subconscious desire to be associated with the nineteenth-century greats.

Ever After, according to Robin Gilmour (2000), 'is less respectful of the academic life than *Possession*' (195). In the book, Bill Unwin inherits his Victorian ancestor Matthew Pearce's Notebooks and, with a fellowship at a Cambridge college endowed by his stepfather, he takes to editing them. (His role as editor recalls the scholar editors discussed in Section II.) Unwin's rightful inheritance is threatened, however, by a usurper, his historian colleague, Michael Potter. Throughout *Ever After*, Unwin and Potter have a sustained fight for the right to edit the Pearce Notebooks. (The right to edit, one can argue, is the right to cut up the spoils however one chooses.) That the papers are keenly sought after is reflected in the following conversation, which takes place during a car ride:

'You're working on the Pearce manuscripts?'

'Yes, as it happens—'

'And how's it coming along?'

I shrugged.

'You can't do it, Bill. You can't fucking do it!'

'I can't?'

'You don't have the background.'

'I'll find out. That's why I was—'

'Why should you spend a year researching what I could tell you right now?'

There was an answer to this, not an easy or a scholarly answer. But this was no time to give it.

'They're my notebooks,' I said.

'It's my field.'

'It's my business.' (163)

The two characters are like carnivores fighting for food. Potter's claim for the Pearce Notebooks is on academic grounds – 'It's *my field*' (emphasis added). In the same conversation, he adds 'The spiritual crisis of the mid-nineteenth century is *my subject*!' (164 emphasis original). On the surface, Potter may seem more intellectually equipped to edit the Notebooks than Unwin, whose field of research is Renaissance prosody. Nevertheless, Unwin

feels a more rightful claim to the Notebooks as they are his family property which he inherited legitimately from his mother. Academic and familial inheritance is in contest, a modern echo of the dispute over birthrights common in Gothic fiction.

Both Unwin and Potter have their own plans about how to use the Victorian inheritance, designs which reflect themes present in *Possession* and *Ever After*. For Unwin, Pearce's journal is his personal fantasyland, and he does not hesitate to supply his own imaginary scenarios to fill the gaps in his ancestor's journal. In his account, he fantasises and speculates habitually, sometimes extensively, about what happened to Pearce. At one point he confesses to his literary fabrications after inventing a lengthy first encounter between Pearce and his future wife: 'I invent all this. I don't know that this is how it happened. It can't have been like this simply because I imagine it so' (109). He even provides a kind of self-justification for filling in the gaps in the journal, saying that 'And if I conjure out of the Notebooks a complete yet hybrid being, part truth, part fiction, is that so false?' (90) For him, Pearce's journal provides a half-blank slate on which he can write his own creative conjectures. This can be interpreted as a case of reverse cannibalism, as Unwin feeds his imagination to populate and complete his ancestor's work.

Unwin's academic rival, Potter, an expert on Victorian faith and doubt, also harbours fantasies about the journal. He dreams of the potential success and academic 'recognition' the Notebooks could bring him (45) as well as his 'duty' to 'the community of learning' (48). The fact that the rightful heir of the Pearce Notebooks is Unwin already suggests which usage of the Victorian inheritance the narrative (or the author) prefers. While the journal inspires literary imagination and creativity in Unwin, if not always academically ethical practices, the same document would likely only produce dry analysis in Potter's hands. The inheritance plot in *Ever After*, then, dramatises the conflict between literary and literal heir (Unwin) and academic heir (Potter) and sides with the former. Even though Unwin is clearly the rightful inheritor of the Victorian legacy, in the end, he hands over the Pearce manuscripts to Potter. This decision is deliberately unsatisfactory and causes the readers to lament the exploitation the Notebooks suffer in the hands of the unsuitable academic heir.

Possession and *Ever After* articulate the concern of identifying the proper heir of Victorian texts. They contrast two sets of possible inheritors: the academics who are driven and self-interested and those who are more imaginative. In both novels, the former is denounced while

the latter is rewarded, as the academics who seek creative inspiration from the nineteenth-century documents are shown to be more suitable heirs. In the contest between the two types of scholars, Byatt and Swift seem to suggest firstly that academics, because of the nature of their work, are likelier candidates to continue the Victorian tradition than those in other professions and secondly, creative intellectuals are preferred to ‘dryasdust’ or overly-theoretical scholars. According to Jo Alyson Parker (1998), ‘The inheritance plot invariably demonstrates that the proper heir to a material estate is also the proper heir to what is, in effect, a moral estate’ (11) and ‘In eighteenth- and early nineteenth century novels, the issue of inheritance customarily plays an important role in resolving conflicts over the grounds for moral and, by extension, literary authority’ (92). By portraying creative academics, and literary writers by extension, as rightful heirs to the Victorian legacy, Byatt and Swift provide an implicit self justification for their own moral and authorial position to rewrite the literature of the period.³⁴ Yet, since their characters are the rightful heirs more through genetic lineage than their academic work, there is to some extent a refutation of academia in general. One cannot help but sense that Byatt and Swift, creative writers themselves and by the logic of their own books the inheritors of the Victorian tradition, on some level express their desire for literary communion with their Victorian ancestors.

V. Conclusion: Worthy heirs

In the novels discussed in this chapter, scholarly pursuit of the Victorian past is to different degrees disparaged and ridiculed, and scholars, like most of those in *Possession*, are placed ‘at an aesthetic disadvantage’ (Gauthier, 2006:38). Together, the novels challenge the notion of academic research as the preferable form of inheriting, conserving and continuing the nineteenth-century cultural heritage. In general, instead of research, they suggest that creative evocation of the Victorian is more productive in making the past relevant to the present time. Textual scholar Roland Michell in *Possession*, for example, liberated from academic trappings and writing poetry by the end of the novel, forges a closer affinity with his poet idol and history. According to Gutleben (2001), ‘Interestingly, it is precisely when he manages to get rid of the teachings of his postmodern times [...] that he gains access to poetic creation and becomes also a literary hero – the worthy heir of Randolph Henry Ash, the Victorian

³⁴ In a review of Peter Ackroyd’s *Dickens* (1990a), John Sutherland points to two approaches to narrate Dickens’s life – academically and creatively. Sutherland suggests that since Dickens was a creative genius, Ackroyd’s approach, which is creative, is superior *de facto*: ‘Ackroyd understands Dickens better than pettifogging academics because Ackroyd, like his subject, is a creative genius, and such minds are privileged to think alike’ (17).

poet' (193). Michell's metamorphosis mirrors Byatt's own attitude, as she 'made no secret of her rejection of contemporary theoretical trends and their supposed disservice to her literary predecessors' and she 'reserves the most damning criticism for academic writing and theory, whose shallowness and artificiality have contributed to literature's growing distance from anything concrete' (Gauthier, 2006:25-26).

D.M. Thomas's *Charlotte: The Final Journey of Jane Eyre* also highlights a conflict between scholarship and creativity, although it focuses on the detrimental effect that academic pursuit has on literary output. Miranda Stevenson, the twentieth-century Victorian scholar in the book, when asked after a conference, 'Dr. Stevenson, you say you can understand [Charlotte Brontë], and you obviously identify with her very strongly. Do you think, if she lived today, her life would be like yours?', returns, 'Yes, I think she might have followed a similar track. She'd have read English, probably, gone to London, taken a PhD – which might have interfered with her creativity. [...] She'd probably, like me, be teaching in a university. In other words, she'd be a much less interesting person!' (121) Here, Stevenson expresses ambivalence towards scholarship – on the one hand she believes academia worthy enough for a Victorian literary celebrity such as Brontë, but on the other hand suggests it would likely have injured Brontë's creativity, and her personality. Stevenson's answer may also point to her own frustrated literary aspirations: if she had not been distracted by the academy, she, too, may have been a great novelist like Brontë.

In the above two examples, we see an artificial dichotomy between scholarship and creativity, a dichotomy present in other novels discussed in this chapter. Although both scholarship and fiction that rely and prey on aspects of the nineteenth century for inspiration can be considered cannibalistic, their own adoption and privileging of the fiction mode and denigration of scholarship allows the neo-Victorian novelists distance from straightforward academic endeavour; with little ambivalence, the creative approach is seen as a more productive means of incorporating and responding to Victorian culture and literature. Byatt, for example, 'stipulates that since the past is largely textual any imaginative re-readings of past texts are best handled by novelists and poets' (Gauthier, 2006:38). Not only might creative writers (or scholars who embrace 'imaginative leaps') best placed to inherit, consume and digest the body of Victorian textual remains, they may also be the true descendents of the nineteenth-century totems and the worthy heirs to the Victorian tradition.

CONCLUSION

Victorian Memes

‘If the poem is food and poison for the critics, it must in its turn have eaten. It must have been a cannibal consumer of earlier poems.’ –J. Hillis Miller (1977)

‘And thus the canon continues to evolve.’ –Carey Perloff (2004)

The preceding chapters have explored the ways in which contemporary neo-Victorian writers cannibalise as well as recreate (often canonical) aspects of the Victorian – the Golden Age of the English novel. However, the writers do not present the past in its exact likeness to achieve complete identification or total communion with the nineteenth century. Rather, they seek to fashion new fictional identities and express modern-day concerns and ideologies. Contemporary writers of different genders, races and nationalities must wrestle and negotiate with the influence of past authors – their literary ancestors – in their carefully selective and by no means ‘random’ (for Fredrick Jameson) appropriation of Victorian celebrities, texts and history. This struggle with the burden of the past results in different degrees of aggressive ambivalence in their treatment of the predecessors. For example, Dickens, regularly appropriated for his cultural capital, is also portrayed as a sexual cannibal; Stoker’s authorial identity is challenged by authors relying on his most famous text, and while new Anglo-American adaptations of *Jane Eyre* return to certain Victorian ideals, the contemporary texts evacuate much of the historical significance of Brontë’s novel. Still, the new breed of fiction creates something original out of something familiar. To use Samuel Butler’s analogy, neo-Victorian novels do not preserve the ‘corpses’ of the Victorian; they incorporate and transform them into new textual bodies.

In the Introduction, I quoted Maggie Kilgour, who writes in *From Communion to Cannibalism* (1990) that ‘the eater is not himself in turn eaten but secures his own identity by absorbing the world outside himself’ (6-7). The eater is the active agent in the binary relationship and is safe from incorporation by his food. Is the Victorian entirely passive, then, in the model I propose, in which the contemporary is the cannibal and the Victorian the cannibalised? The neo-Victorian, due to its chronological position, has the advantage of being able to appropriate nineteenth-century substances. On occasion, the Victorian emerges as the stronger of the two, uncannily cannibalises the contemporary even while being incorporated itself. After all, neo-Victorian authors, like their culture, are still wrestling with Victorian subjects and influences. Stoker’s *Dracula* and its afterlife is an ideal case, particularly its

ability to continually reinvent itself in the latest cultural expressions and tastes. *Jane Eyre* can also be seen as consuming its Caribbean adaptation *Wide Sargasso Sea* – Rhys’s text would not exist in its current form without the Victorian original. Just as Harold Bloom argues in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) that sometimes ‘the tyranny of time is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that [later writers] are being *imitated by their ancestors*’ (141, emphasis original), it is also possible to see ‘the tyranny of time’ reverse the relationship between the contemporary and the Victorian. The powerful precursor has defied time, survived changing cultural climates and cannibalised its way trans-historically to arrive in the present in the body of the neo-Victorian. The precursors are thus ‘cannibal consumers’ of *later* texts.

Frank Kermode (2004) believes some works remain in the canon because of ‘inertia’ (34) rather than readers’ conscious efforts to preserve their status. Neo-Victorian fiction, however, makes a conscious attempt to reintroduce the Victorian into the contemporary, suggesting that many nineteenth-century subjects retain their canonical position not out of ‘inertia’ but out of a lasting and evolving influence. The Victorian elements incorporated into new fiction speak to the sense that writers and readers alike continue to see them as relevant and worthy of being updated to suit current needs and preoccupations. These nineteenth-century texts and authors, instead of being withdrawn or ‘retired’ from the canon, prove to be transcendental and reproducible. They are capable of being infused with new meanings and attracting fresh attention, rather than shutting out creative possibilities for their successors. As a consequence, they are deservedly given additional leases on life, migrating and splitting from one canon (while simultaneously remaining within it) to a different one, albeit in changed forms. Lesser Victorian works, too, once having been resurrected in the body of the neo-Victorian, may also be given a new afterlife. W.H. Mallock’s *The Human Document* (1892), an obscure Victorian novel, is now in print again, thanks to Tom Phillips’s ‘cannibalism’ (Phillips’s own word) in *The Humument* (1966-).

In ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), T.S. Eliot claims that ‘the most individual parts of [a poet’s] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously’ (37). My argument – that neo-Victorian writers express individuality and self-identity through a process of differentiation – is somewhat different from Eliot’s, but I agree that literary predecessors often achieve haunting immortality in later writers’ work. This is similar to what Marina Warner (2002) writes about the ending of

Plato's *Republic*: the immortal dead 'return[s] in a change of outward shape and terrestrial identity' (205). In neo-Victorian fiction, the nineteenth-century substances are changed and evolved, and found in a nexus of temporal, spatial and textual ideas different from those in which they first appeared. As T.S. Eliot writes in 'Little Gidding' (1942), 'To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern'.

An entangled pattern of the Victorian and the contemporary can be discerned, and we see a process of infinitely reversible cannibalism in neo-Victorian fiction. While the contemporary texts rely on and cannibalise aspects of the Victorian (overtly or subtly), the strong nineteenth-century precursors in turn cannibalise the contemporary by influencing writers and continuing to demand and compete for their readers' attention. This development enables the Victorian to continue to survive, as well as metamorphosing into new forms. The identities of guest and host are confused or collapsed in neo-Victorian texts, in which the contemporary and Victorian share the same textual body and form a kind of communion. They mutually feed on one another, neither annihilating or completely incorporating the other. Cannibalism does not end here, however. As Maggie Kilgour (1990) writes, 'though a textual body has physical substance, its material is not confined within its borders but may enter into other textual bodies, as well as minds' (225). The material inside a text is fluid, vulnerable to appropriation by other writers to form yet newer textual bodies. As in the contemporary novels discussed in Chapter Three; they incorporate elements of both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the latter being the result of cannibalism. Thus, newer novels may be turned into food and incorporated by other late-comer texts, furthering the process of literary cannibalism.

What is the future of the Victorian in this continuing course of literary cannibalism and evolution? As discussed, the Victorian is not always clearly visible in the neo-Victorian. Writers in the genre may also choose to incorporate material from other periods. This is the case, for example, in Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress*, whose title gestures towards the seventeenth-century Dutch painting *Girl in a Pearl Earring* and whose text employs dramatic Shakespearean language. The adaptations of *Dracula*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Turn of the Screw* also demonstrate that beyond the Victorian originals, the authors have appropriated readers' and critics' interpretations of the nineteenth-century works. The novels studied in Chapter Four even contain pseudo-Victorian texts and celebrities invented by contemporary writers who have cannibalising their own scholarly knowledge in their fiction. As a result, the

Victorianness evoked in neo-Victorian novels can sometimes feel incidental. If the Victorian elements are evacuated from neo-Victorian literature, we are left with an abandoned house, open to re-haunting by the ghosts of other periods. The possible emptying of the Victorian content prompts a dramatic rethink of the meaning of 'Victorian' in neo-Victorian fiction.

It might be inevitable that the so-called 'authentic' Victorian elements we are familiar with (or think we know) will eventually thin out in neo-Victorian fiction. The more sophisticated the genre becomes, the more its new texts will require differentiate from their prototypes and predecessors – by revisiting, perhaps, lesser known Victorian works, personae and ideas (elements which might be so obscure that general readers will mistake for 'new') or by inventing new language and styles to narrate the Victorian. In fact, these developments are already being enacted in the genre. While the novels discussed in the first three chapters all look back to readily identifiable canonical Victorian elements, some of the works analysed in Chapter Four deviate from the straightforward neo-Victorian pattern. The more pervasive Victorian elements, I am sure, will persist and survive. We glimpse of their persistence in the texts discussed in Chapter Three, in which the later novels forge a closer affinity with the Victorian *Jane Eyre* than with the Caribbean *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Something of Richard Dawkins's 'meme' outlined in *The Selfish Gene* (2005[1976]) is operating on the literary. According to Dawkins, 'memes' are cultural genes, each 'a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*' (192, emphasis original). While genes propagate themselves in the body, memes propagate themselves in the mind, and like genes, some memes have higher survival values – even, it seems, against cannibalism. While Christian Gutleben (2001) writes that 'retro-Victorian fiction constitutes a response to the evolution of the publishing context and displays a remarkable capacity of adaptation to its cultural environment' (205), I believe it is those Victorian memes with the highest survival values that will continue to exploit, evolve and survive, even if this means attaching itself to the latest literary cannibal.

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